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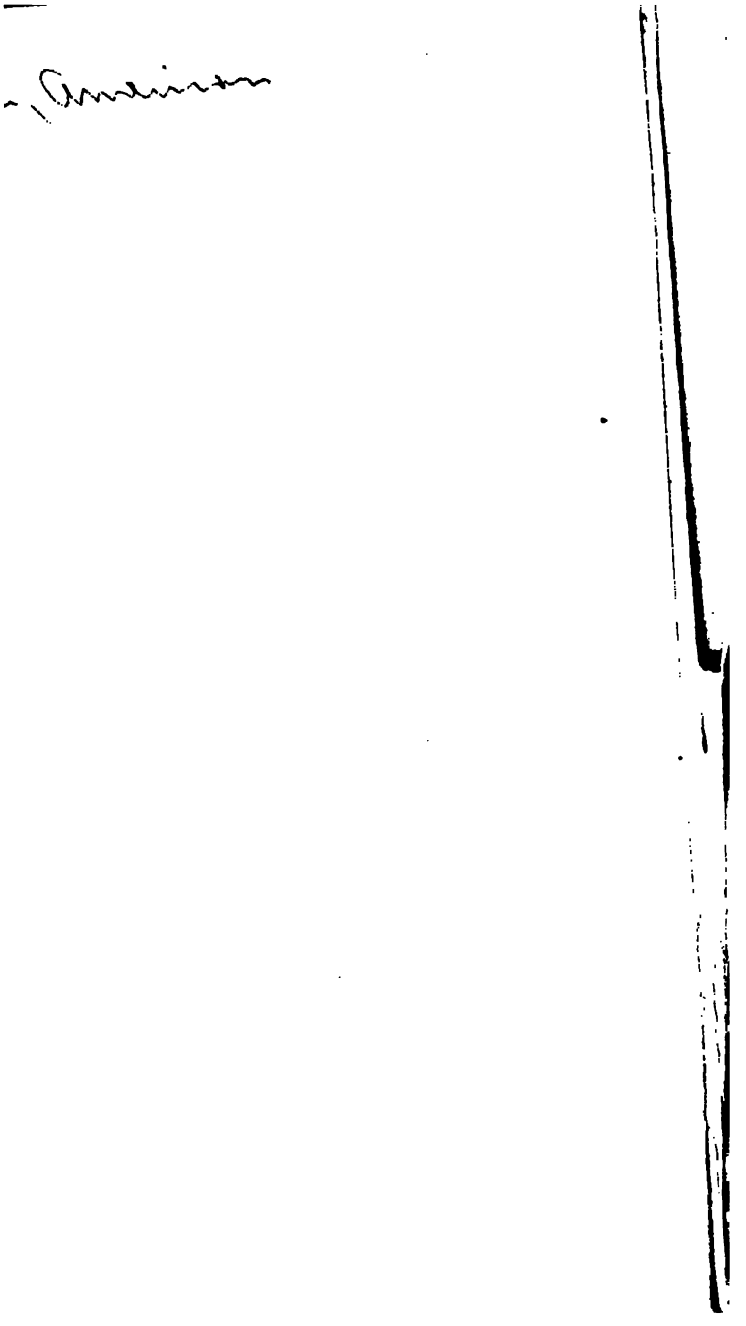
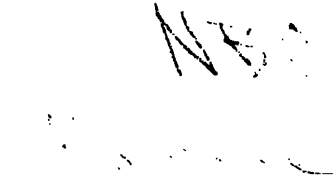
THE THOROUGHBRED

EDITH MACVANE

. Fiction, American





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"JIM, MY DARLING JIM! YOU'RE ALIVE! I HAVE YOU—I HAVE YOU!"

Page 50.

The Thoroughbred

BY

EDITH MACVANE

Illustrations by

CHARLES GRUNWALD

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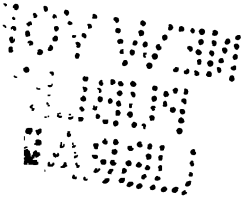

To

MY SISTER DOROTHY

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THE THOROUGHBRED.

CHAPTER I.

Ellen Palliser's Terrible Ordeal.

Ellen Palliser, sitting at her toilet-table, clasped a dog-collar of topaz and diamonds about her throat. Then with her hand-mirror she surveyed the effect, turning her head this way and that under the electric light, solicitously.

The maid behind her, delighted at the unusual keenness of her mistress' interest, looked on her completed work with a professional's pleasure. She knew what weeks of careful planning, of fierce intellectual effort, had gone to produce the charming picture in the mirror before her; where corn-colored satin reflected the luster of pale blond hair, and winking yellow jewels added the accent of summer sunshine to the whole. And being a woman herself, she realized that these carefully wrought details typified more than external vanity.

"Madame is beautiful like a queen this evening," she observed, with a diplomatic grin.

Ellen, drawing a long breath, surveyed her own reflection in a passionate questioning. She had reasons of her own for wanting to be beautiful to-night.

"Armandine, is Mr. Palliser come home yet?"

"No, madame."

"Ah." Ellen glanced at the clock on her dressing-table. Its hands marked seven o'clock. "And dinner is at eight," she said. "He has been detained at the bank again. It's cruel the way they work him since his promotion! Armandine, go to monsieur's room and see that his things are properly laid out. I'm all finished except my rings, and I think I can manage those by myself."

The little Frenchwoman ducked her head to show that she understood that part of the rambling address which was directed to her; and with soft footsteps she left the room. Her mistress remained motionless with a little smile of excitement, of delight that was almost pain, upon her lips—the same smile with which, after four years

of married life, she waited always for Jim Palliser's coming.

"He declares he can dress in seven minutes and a half," she murmured to herself, with an indulgent fondness. "Very well, I'm afraid he'll have a chance to defeat his own record to-night!"

She bent over her open jewel-box, in an arduous selection of the rings which were to complete her costume. The jewels before her were many; her inheritance from her mother, her gifts from the old uncle whose heiress she was some day to be, the diamonds which Jim himself had recently presented to her. She caught up the glittering crescent and pressed it to her cheek in a little passionate gesture; it was to her the symbol of her husband's success, of the courage and skill which already, at the age of thirty-five, had made him a power in the financial world of New York. Only six months before, from being the private secretary and confidential right-hand man of the president, he had been appointed cashier of the trust company whose service he had entered as a boy. The gift of the diamond crescent had been in honor of this promotion; the very dinner to-

night, the first given in their new apartment and in their enlarged style of living, was in compliment to Jim's chief, the Patroons Trust president, and his wife. To-night, for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. Durham were coming to dine with the Pallisers.

Ellen drew in her breath sharply. For her, the name of Violet Durham embodied the most painful thought in the world. Over this woman hung a mystery which even in thought she hardly dared to challenge.

"Nonsense!" she said to herself with resolution as she turned to the glass with her powder-puff. But just the same her brown eyes kept going back in a kind of tormented irresolution, past the silver puff-box, past the crystal scent-bottles and the little red-labeled bottle that the careless Armandine had left among them, to the jewel-box where her rings glittered ready.

She glanced from side to side—no one. She listened—Jim had not come, though the hands of the little clock pointed now to fifteen minutes past the hour. Of late, his duties had absorbed him more and more. The Patroons Trust, though

one of the solidest affairs in the city, had not been unaffected by the recent sensational failures and threatened slump in values. If Jim was detained at the office it was hardly surprising—there was one comfort, the pressing affairs which held the cashier from his dinner must probably hold the president, too. If the host was to be late there was small danger that the guests of honor would be early.

Mechanically she slipped the jeweled circlets upon her fingers. Then slowly as though drawn by an irresistible impulse, her glittering hand crept back to the deep morocco box.

Beneath the tray was another tray; beneath that again a false bottom, opened by a concealed spring. Ellen, touching it, disclosed not precious stones, but a letter.

With fingers that trembled slightly, Ellen unfolded it. It was written on Waldorf stationery, gold-embossed, and even after the lapse of years emitted an oddly thick perfume. The writer, who signed "Adoring Violet," besought her dearest Jimmy not to be heart-broken, but what could she do? What could any little stenographer do,

when her employer proposed to her, and him a millionaire? Jim must not be angry with her, her heart was broken and she would never love another, but she had married Mr. Durham that afternoon.

Ellen took in her breath as she turned the envelope in her hand. It bore the stamp of a date five years before—as everybody in New York knew, it was now five years since William Durham, the matrimonial catch of thirty-five years' standing, had startled the town by his sudden marriage with his typewriter. A year later Jim Palliser had married Ellen. What had been his state of mind in that intervening year?

What had happened before? What had he felt after? Ellen did not know. She only knew that, in the pocket of some old clothes that her husband had asked her to give away, she had once found this letter. A mere movement of mechanical curiosity had caused her to glance at the stray paper thus tossed into her hands. Shame at the idea of having violated her husband's privacy had held her silent.

For nearly two years now she had preserved

her silence. Yet a curiosity, which at times almost approached the horror of doubt, came back at intervals to rend and rack her. Ellen Palliser loved her husband with a still and brooding intensity that was the passion of her life. Of the love that he gave her in return she could entertain no real doubt. And yet, what had this other woman been to him? What had been their relationship, for which the writer of this letter had so frantically implored secrecy?

Don't give me away to Mr. Durham—he doesn't suspect a thing. And if you don't give me away, there's no one else on earth that can. Darling Jimmy, I'm a little beast, I know, but mum's the word for you and me—isn't it? Isn't it?

Most assuredly it had been. Ellen at least had not broken the silence. And that between the writer of the letter and the person to whom it was addressed, there had been since marriage no relations not absolutely formal, she was sure—almost sure. That between them there had never been any tie discreditable to either, she was, by her knowledge of one of them, sure—almost sure.

But absolutely certain? No.

For the absolute certainty which her heart craved could be won only by one course: by that of presenting herself to her husband in the rôle of a doubting and jealous wife. And by a sure instinct, she knew the certain loss of power which the admission of such weakness must cost her. In the strong, pure-hearted serenity with which her husband credited her, and which she tried to attain, she knew lay the very essence of her hold over his volatile and impetuous nature. Suppose that, in satisfying herself that Jim had never really loved Violet Durham, she herself lost something of the perfection of his love? Or suppose, on the contrary, she found——

She rose, with a little shiver. The hands of the clock pointed at half-past seven. In a half-hour she was to face the writer of that letter. She forced her soft lips back to the gay smile that they had worn a few moments previous, and replaced the letter in its hiding-place.

It was odd, Jim had not yet come home! Careless he often was, troubled and overdriven at this moment by his business cares she knew him

to be. But to-night, so important an occasion! Whatever might be the actual state of affairs, past or present, which lay beneath this mysterious letter of Violet Durham's, it was obvious that Jim must be as desirous as herself that his home appear all that was charming and successful in the eyes of the woman who had once deserted him.

The telephone on her toilet-table tinkled lightly. She sat down again, while the forced smile on her lips quivered to an eager little line of joy. Of course, it was Jim.

"Hello!" she said.

A voice answered her—a voice that she knew, and yet did not know. "Hello—is this Ellen?" said the voice.

"Yes, Jim. What's the matter? Why don't you come home?"

"Are you alone?" asked her husband's voice.

Her heart leaped in a little startled pang. She glanced about the room. "Wait a moment," she said, and laid down the instrument. A moment later she had closed the bedroom doors, and returned once more to the toilet-table. The ques-

tion with which he had prefaced his conversation was one which often enough passed between them. And yet to-night, while the moments were flying by which should bring him home!

"Hello, Jim," she said.

"Yes," he answered. His tones were dull and far away.

"Jim, what is it?"

No answer came to her but the soft hum of the wires.

"Jim, have you forgotten that the Durhams are coming to dinner at eight o'clock? In a half-hour?"

"No, Nelly, I haven't forgotten."

"Jim, please come home! I'm all dressed, and at this very moment I ought to be in the dining-room looking after the flowers, and seeing that the wine is properly iced. Bad boy, you'll have no time to attend to it!"

"It doesn't matter," her husband answered. This time the voice was so dull, so lifeless, so totally unlike his usual buoyant and radiant tone, that Ellen's vague uneasiness changed to a very real alarm.

"My dear Jim, are you ill?"

"No."

"Then what's the matter? Where are you now?"

"I'm at the office."

"At the Patroons?"

"Yes, in Mr. Durham's private room."

"Ah!—Is Mr. Durham there with you?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Nobody, I'm alone."

"Then, my dear Jim, if no one is keeping you, then why do you stay? Hurry, hurry! Hop in a tax and tell the man rush! It's only thirty blocks—you ought to do it in ten minutes. My dear boy, do you realize that the Durhams will be here at eight o'clock?"

"I realize that," returned her husband's voice mechanically.

"Jim, what *is* the matter? You mustn't be late, when your chief dines with us—and the first time, too! Would you want to offend Mr. Durham?"

A little laughing breath came to her over the

wire; but it was a laugh without mirth. Her perplexity and trouble grew from that of the hostess to that of the wife.

"Jim, there *is* something the matter——"

"Yes, Ellen, dear."

"Jim! What is it?"

"I can't say it, dear."

"What, Jim, what?"

"What I called you up to say."

"Do you want to drive me crazy? What did you call me up to say to me?"

"Good-by."

Ellen's eyes wandered in a sudden sick bewilderment. Had Jim been drinking? By habit he was one of the most abstemious of men. Being, as he himself said, "born drunk," he limited his overimpressionable nature always to a severely restricted allowance. To-night, of all nights, had he ventured to——

"Jim! What have you been doing to yourself?"

Again that little mirthless laugh vibrated over the wires. "Nothing, dear, I assure you I'm

quite sober. It's the fact, you see. I'm going away."

The slow finality of the tone could leave no doubt as to the speaker's serious meaning. For the first time the woman realized that she was face to face, not with a moment's awkwardness but with tragedy. Her breath came short. Was it the tragedy in whose shadow for two years now she had lived? Had the calamity symbolized for her by Violet Durham's letter, hidden at her elbow, overtaken her at last?

"Jim! Don't be afraid to tell me the truth. Whom are you going away with?"

"No one, dear. I'm going alone."

Truth was in his voice. Somber, inexplicable as was that truth, it brought relief that was almost joy from what she had feared.

"Jim, dearest! You're in trouble!"

"Yes, Ellen, I'm in trouble!"

A twanging of the wires interrupted her. For the first time she realized the thin uncertain thread by which she held him. "Central! You cut me off. Hello, Central!"

Desperately she moved the hook up and down.

The little familiar gesture seemed ludicrously inadequate beside the immense issues which it symbolized for her. Jim, her darling, was in trouble. He might be gone, she knew not where, before she found him again.

"Central—connect me again with that Thirty-eighth Street number I had—Jim, Jim, is this you?"

"Yes, Nelly."

Her sudden relief was driven out by the madness whipped up by his strange hesitation. "Jim, I can't wait any longer. What's the trouble?"

"I'm ruined, Nelly."

This time her relief broke into the telephone in a laugh that ended in a sob. "Is *that* all? Dear boy, come home!"

"Nelly, don't you understand? Durham has done me. I've let myself in for a Sing Sing job. I've been what you call easy—but not criminal, dear. Crime isn't my style. But I'm landed there, just the same. There's nothing for me to do, I've seen my lawyer. Durham has got me where it's no use my squealing. I won't wear stripes. I'm an innocent man. So I'll quit."

The words, feverish and appalling, rattled like a shower of bullets into the warm, delicately furnished room. With the vague tale of business disaster, Ellen had small concern. The speaker was her interest. The last words were those that claimed her.

"You're going away, Jim? Without coming home?"

"Yes."

"Where, Jim, where?" Flying thoughts of the Orient, of the gray Pampas of Patagonia, rushed confusedly through her brain. Jim, her husband, a fugitive in the dim back waters of the world!

There was a little vibrating silence. Jim's voice was a trifle husky as he answered:

"Ellen, I can tell you the truth. You don't flinch, you're a thoroughbred. You always were a thoroughbred, you know——"

She laughed unsteadily at the little familiar word. In the days of their courtship, her exploits in the hunting-field had won the commendation that her poise of character had since retained. In a little mechanical shock of subconscious thought, she gave thanks that by keeping

her difficult silence of the past two years she had managed to hold her right to the little flattering epithet she loved.

"Yes, Jim, I'm not afraid. I'll go with you. Wait for me, dear."

"No, Nelly, I can't take you."

"Why not?"

"Don't you understand, darling? Where I'm going, one goes alone."

The words might have meant anything. The voice could mean only one thing. Its cadence touched Ellen in a kind of dumb electric shock. She fought away the conviction.

"Jim! You mean——"

"I've got to, dear. It's my only way out."

"But now—now? Without coming home?"

A laugh came over the wires—his old laugh. "There's the sign hanging here on the wall before me: 'Do It Now!'"

"Jim—are you crazy?"

His laugh sounded again, more brokenly. "I was, till an hour ago. Then I saw the way out—the only way. So I went out and made a purchase. I'm all right now."

"Jim—not a—not a revolver?"

"Yes, dear."

"Is it there before you?"

"Yes, dear."

She fought desperately for her failing strength. The picture was vivid in her eyes: Jim Palliser, her husband, sitting there in the shadowy elegance of the private office, with the light from the green-shaded lamp falling on his handsome head and on the small glittering object before him. So vividly she saw the picture, she could hardly realize it was a mile and a half away, connected with her only by the intricate miracle of this magnetized wire. This realization of her own helplessness fell on her in a kind of numb horror. In a fury of resolution she fought back the rising weakness.

"Jim, what right have you to call me up and tell me this—when I can do nothing?"

The voice in which he answered showed for the first time the deadly quality of the man's despair.

"I know, Nelly, it's not fair to you. But I couldn't go out without telling you I'm not the

fraud and embezzler they're going to make me out. It'll all be in the papers in a day or two—the proof is all against me, and the money's gone. But just the same, I've played a straight game from start to finish—that's what I want you to know; that's what I want you to remember after I'm gone, little girl."

"Then if you're innocent why are you afraid? We'll fight it out side by side—come home, darling, come home!"

The man's voice took on a new tenderness, but held its unflinching resolution. "Come home, where the police will come to find me in a couple of days? Drag you down to the Tombs—down to the court-room? Have you pointed out in the street, stared at, photographed—you, my beautiful Ellen, the wife of Palliser the embezzler! So you think I'd drag you through that? No, this is the only way to hush it up, and have it over with. I could see my lawyer thought the same, though of course he didn't dare to say so outright. Don't try to break down my resolution, darling—I can see so plainly, it's the one thing left for me to do."

Even in her mortal distress Ellen's heart leaped with a strange pride. It was of her he thought —twisted, warped as were his ideas of serving her, it was as a sacrifice to her that this dreadful deed was to be committed. The words came pouring in a desperate flood from her lips, close-pressed against the transmitter.

"Jim, listen! You say it's for my sake you're going to die? No, if it's me you think of you must live for my sake—you must live for me!"

There were a click and buzz of crossing wires, in which the murmured answer was lost. Ellen clutched the cold nickel of the little mechanism as though it were the beloved living flesh which with her own hands she was trying to drag back from the fate that threatened it. The frail inadequacy of the tie by which she held him impressed her suddenly with its grotesque unreality. Already, her husband was to her no more than a disembodied voice. Soon he would not be even that. Her voice breathed into the transmitter as the lips of the prophet may have breathed into the dead mouth of the widow's son, with a hot insistence of life.

"Jim, are we cut off? Dear, are you there?"

"I'm here. Good-by now, darling."

"Jim, one moment——" In a last desperate inspiration, Ellen's eyes searched the glittering table before her. In one corner, behind the shining crystal bottles, the red-labeled bottle caught her eye. She leaned over and one white arm shot swiftly out.

"Jim, you are still resolved?"

"I must, darling. It's the only thing to do. It's a man's honor. Don't you understand?"

She shuddered, and the bottle in her hand clicked against the stem of the instrument. The coils of the green cord winding in her lap appeared to her distorted fancy like the spirals of a deadly snake. The whole room blurred and swam before her eyes. It seemed to her that she existed only as a voice, and that with it her life itself went streaming out over the wire.

"Very well, Jim, if you are resolved then so am I. Go, if you must. But I go with you!"

"Ellen! What do you mean?"

The cold numb accents were touched with a

sudden life. In grim determination Ellen pursued her new advantage.

"I understood you. Can't you understand me?"

"No. Are you crazy, child?"

Ellen's laugh fluttered like a broken organ-tone. "No crazier than you are, dear. You have your revolver there before you. Can't you guess what I hold here—here in my hand?"

"Not—not another revolver?"

Ellen laughed again. "No—that's not a woman's weapon. It's just a bottle of carbolic, that Armandine left here after cleaning my bath-room to-day."

There was a pause. Then the answer came slowly. "What? What? You mean you'd *drink* the stuff?"

"What do you think I mean?" returned Ellen briefly.

She spoke in a fierce satisfaction like that of a soldier going to face almost certain death in the rescue of a comrade. Whether Palliser would take her threat seriously, whether her words would carry weight to withhold his hand

from his own desperate purpose she did not know; body and soul together were keyed to the point where their final dissolution might be met with a triumphant indifference. It was not her life that mattered, but her husband's.

"Ellen, be reasonable!" Palliser's voice came in the challenge of a sudden command. "Put down that poison. I've explained to you my reasons for what I must do. Let me do it. Give me your word that you'll do nothing desperate, and let me say good-by."

Ellen's cold fingers clutched the deadly phial. This time she spoke not wildly, but in the measured tones of her inflexible purpose.

"Jim, I swear to you that if you ring off without giving me your word of honor to lock up that revolver and come straight home, I drink this bottle of carbolic acid that I hold here in my hand."

Her voice, cold and matter-of-fact, carried the conviction that her passionate pleading had failed to do. This time it was Palliser's voice that suddenly melted and broke.

"No, no, Nelly, you won't do it!"

She laughed grimly. "You think so? To be sure, you'll never know that you were wrong. But who can tell? Perhaps—somewhere—we'll meet again soon—and I can say to you: 'Dear Jim, you were wrong. You see, you were wrong.'"

Her voice broke suddenly, for the fiercely taxed strength with which she wrestled was ebbing fast. Her husband's voice came in a cry of despair.

"But, Nelly—Carbolic? It's torture!"

"Torture!"

In the single word, torn from her stiffened lips, the whole agony of her tormented spirit went throbbing over the wire. Its message seemed a sudden revelation to the despairing man who listened.

"Nelly, dear Nelly! I never dreamed you'd take it like this—I never meant to torture you, darling."

She tore at his relenting like a prisoner at a sudden streak of light. "Then come home!"

"To disgrace?"

"To me!"

"You're not afraid?"

"I'm afraid of nothing but losing you. I love you! If you die I follow you."

A long sigh came through the telephone. "Nelly, I give up. What you threaten—I can't risk that. I'll come home."

"Now?"

"Immediately."

"Your word of honor?"

"My word of honor."

"Ah!"

The click of the receiver, replaced at the other end, came to Ellen's ears. The disconnected instrument lay in her lap. The lights of her bedroom were warm and gay about her. The silver-topped bottles, the window hangings, the flowered wall-paper—they were all there, unchanged and familiar. It seemed to her that she had been away forever. And yet the hands of the little silver clock ticked at a quarter before eight. Fifteen minutes! Was it only fifteen minutes that she had been gone? In her hand-to-hand conflict with the invisible forces of death, she had a

curious illusion of having moved out of the ordinary regions of time and space.

And yet her hand hardly shook as she replaced the little red-labeled bottle upon the table. Her own death—that was nothing. To a woman it is the life or death of the man she loves that is the symbol of infinity. Horror of what had just passed touched her only as it concerned him. Though at the moment she was conscious of nothing but triumph at her success in saving him from himself. Terror of the threatened disgrace, resentment at him who had so cruelly shocked her—they did not exist. Jim was coming home to her. Faintly, from the other end of the apartment, the electric bell tinkled. With a sweep of yellow drapery, Ellen Palliser rose and went to the drawing-room to receive the first of her guests.

CHAPTER II.

The Farce of Dinner.

The Durhams were the first to arrive. Ellen, conscious of the absolute necessity of preserving an unruffled front, received them smilingly and made excuses for her husband. It was business, that ridiculous business, that had detained him; he would be here in a moment or two at the least. Her apologies were received so smilingly, so unconcernedly, that she almost rubbed her eyes. After all, had it not been all a dream, that dreadful voice on the telephone?

The sight of Mr. Durham, large, portly, a little bald, with a manner that had made the fortune of the Patroons Trust—this dignified spectacle had at first reassured Ellen's terrors like a breath of common sense let in on vaporish imaginings. Surely, poor Jim had deceived himself; surely, a man like this could meditate no vulgar treachery—least of all, against the man

whose hospitality he was at the moment accepting!

The Durhams were early. They were obliged to sit for some moments waiting for the arrival of Mr. Belden and of Mrs. Swanwick, the little widow who made the sixth. Violet Durham, smiling at her hostess, led the conversation as usual.

"Poor Mr. Palliser is still down at the office? I know it myself, that office, from the safe to the door-mat! And I don't mind owning that I do —there's no pride about little *me!* And I'm sure I know how to sympathize with those that are still tied to the grind!"

The financier's young wife was a tall, full-blown blonde; very hard as to her large blue eyes, and very soft as to the dazzling white shoulders that her rose-point dress displayed so lavishly. From ears to finger-tips she sparkled with diamonds, like a Christmas-tree. She made a pale-colored, brilliant figure, with no dark spot but that of the purple namesake flowers which rose and fell on her breast, and the little dark

shadow that her beauty cast always over her hostess' heart. Her husband surveyed her adoringly.

Her manner toward the elderly financier who had given her so much was, however, one of visible constraint. When he leaned toward her she leaned away in an almost imperceptible shrinking. And in spite of the robust bloom of her appearance, she gnawed perpetually at her scarlet lips in a nervousness which seemed not born of the occasion but of habit; while her glittering finger-tips pulled unceasingly at the jewels on her hand. She seemed visibly anxious to create a dashing impression, and still more anxious to conceal her anxiety. And like her hostess, she laughed and talked and strained her ears undisguisedly at every tinkle of the door-bell.

Ellen, who since the coming of her guests had schooled herself into her usual outward serenity, had nearly persuaded her mind that the whole fearful business of ten minutes ago was no more than the figment of her own disordered imagination. When suddenly she became aware of the little sharp glances which the bank president,

now and then, darted under his heavy eyebrows toward the door.

At these signs of a doubt as piercing, probably better founded than her own, Ellen's heart fell suddenly to more than its former coldness of fear. It was plain, Mr. Durham was in doubt whether Jim Palliser would ever come.

The succeeding moments which Ellen spent in entertaining her guests, in greeting the later arrivals, were like a dreadful dream which overbore even the terrible remembrance of her quarter hour at the telephone. Her husband had given her his word of honor; but with that deadly peril hanging over him, with that deadly instrument in his hand—how could she ever be certain, till her very eyes beheld him again?

The interminable minutes dragged by, with commonplace smiles and chatter. The door-bell rang twice. Ellen swallowed the pangs of her fierce expectancy, her deadly disappointment. She greeted her guests. She called her little Japanese butler, and instructed him in the making of the cocktails which it was always the host's pride to mix with his own hands.

"We'll drink to Mr. Palliser's speedy coming," she said, with a resolute smile.

Her hearing was stretched for the sound of a footstep; it seemed to her that her heart had stopped beating, lest its throb should dim the acuteness of her ear. She waited and sickened and agonized, while her lips smiled and talked. The moments went by, moments watched and counted till they stretched themselves to a kind of twanging infinity. Though, as a matter of fact, the hands of the clock pointed only to quarter after eight when at last the door-latch clicked and the well-known step sounded in the corridor.

Ellen, in the long breath of relief which seemed to loosen the very stricture of death from her heart, caught for the flash of a moment Mr. Durham's keen eye upon her. That glance of intelligence, which was in itself a confession, stirred her to a sudden inner fury. That he, who had wantonly struck at the life and honor of one whom she so tenderly loved, should dare to come thus under pretense of friendship to her house! If she had had the means, she could have found it in her heart at that moment to slip from the

room and place poison in the food that he was presently to eat.

The dinner, after all, was not so late. The cocktails, excellently prepared by Nikeda, served to wile the time of waiting. And the host eclipsed his own record for lightning change, by appearing in the drawing-room exactly seven minutes after the front door had clicked to his opening. Ellen, who in composure had borne the strain of waiting, nearly broke out into childish tears of joy at the sight of that well-known figure smiling in the doorway. The life that shone from his eyes, from his clear ruddy tints, seemed to her a miracle almost too dear and beautiful to be borne. She rose with a little sobbing breath that ended in a peal of nervous laughter, and demanded his apologies for the waiting dinner.

"Pease in my shoes and nails in my plate, if that will show my repentance! And my humble apologies to you all for my disgraceful tardiness. No, I won't wait even for my cocktail—*that's* a guarantee of sincere penitence, isn't it? And now, Mrs. Durham, may I have the pleasure?"

His gaiety, though hurried, seemed as spon-

taneous as ever. His lips were firm, his head was held high. In all the brilliancy of his handsome looks, he seemed a being too strong and vital for the pale shadow of death even to touch.

The dinner was a success. The hostess' careful preparation, her present determined exertion, was a guarantee of that. The Pommery was of a special vintage, bestowed on her by her uncle; the terrapin were stewed to a turn. Led by the volatile gaiety of the host, the chatter flew briskly back and forth across the little round table. But even while Ellen smiled and talked, the thought never left her mind. Beneath the azaleas, and the diamonds, and the restless airy laughter, what dark mysterious forces were working?

In the days of the Borgias themselves, had hatreds better dissembled smiled one at the other across a dinner-table? The bold, stately financier who with cynical ruthlessness had struck at the life of his host—who to-morrow even would make life a thing impossible to him—yet to-night was eating his mallard duck and smiling at his jokes. Jim, himself, volatile and charming, yet with the touch of a revolver still cold on his fin-

gers, on his very temple perhaps. Ellen, herself, with the hearty good-will to do murder with her own hand, if thereby she could save the one beloved. And Violet Durham, restless and demure, hiding beneath her bediamonded bosom who knew what memories—what secret hopes?

The interminable farce of dinner dragged itself at last to an end. When at length the little company seated itself in the small drawing-room, in the blue mist of cigarette smoke and the fresh aroma of Chartreuse, Ellen began to breathe freer. The end of this torturing suspense, if still distant, was at length in sight.

"Bridge? No, indeed!" cried Violet in answer to a hinted proposition of her husband's. "I'm saving cards for when I'm old, which it's horrid to think of. In the meantime, if I can't have really *good* conversation I always say: Give me a book!"

At this eminently fitting remark, her husband brightened up from his late rebuff. "That's true," he said, addressing the company with the happy fatuity often observed in the strongest of men, "that's true; there never was such a reader

as that little girl—full of imagination, and literary feeling! Our house is simply littered with books. If you'll believe me she turned on the lamp in the motor, coming down here to-night, and read a novel every moment of the way!"

He spoke as proudly as though he related some personal tribute to himself.

"Oh, I'm a little wonder!" cried Violet.

"My dear, you are," returned her elderly husband gravely. "Among friends, I may say it. For she's a business woman, too, this little girl of mine," he added, surveying her with open fondness. "Isn't she, Palliser? We don't pretend to conceal our office days, do we? We're proud of them! And she has never ceased to keep a grip on the business, Mrs. Palliser," he went on, with pride, "no head like hers for business details, that's what I always say! Even now, I often take her advice on practical matters, and trust to her memory for facts that can't be put on paper—the combination of my safe, verbal promises, and so forth. Now that my memory is growing a bit weak, you can imagine what a help this is to me. My dear, I will say it." He

turned back obstinately to his wife, who sat tapping her satin-shod foot. "Why not, when it's true?"

"Oh, it's true, all right," cried Violet, with her laugh, "and very interesting conversation, too, for me! But if I let you go on this way, who can tell but they'll be thinking I'm conceited? Little me—the modestest little flower in the world!" As though to point her next shot she touched the flowers on her bosom, then glanced at her husband's gray head with an indescribable impudence. "'A Violet by a Mossy Stone,'" she added, "that's little me!"

"But not," murmured Belden, "'half hidden from the eye'!" And from his place on the sofa beside his hostess, he glanced at the speaker's frank decolletage.

"What's that wretch saying about me, Mrs. Palliser?" cried Mrs. Durham in her sharp nervous tones, that contrasted always so oddly with the smooth amplitude of her appearance. "Now, you people can stop making fun of little me, and sit down at your bridge, that I know you're pining for. And I'll make your hearts jump with a

little music. Mr. Palliser, as I know you hate cards as much as me, perhaps you'll turn the leaves?"

At this rather barefaced proposition Ellen opened her eyes. At any other time Violet's air of easy proprietorship toward the man whom once she had claimed under so vague and unknown a tie, would have been extremely galling to his wife. As it was, the scheme offered a chance of passing the weary hour till their guests might withdraw and leave her alone with her husband.

"Music's the thing," agreed Mrs. Durham's host, as he followed her to the piano. "Come, this bit of the 'Merry Widow.' It's as charming as—as——"

"As a sin?"

"As yourself, I was going to say, Mrs. Durham!"

"The same thing, I'm afraid—now!"

The whispered words might mean much or little. To Ellen Palliser at the moment they meant little. Mechanically she cut and dealt. The game

proceeded briskly. The music rippled through the room. Violet Durham's fingers, trained to agility through years at the typewriter, had since her marriage conquered along with other social accomplishments—a certain smartness of touch at the piano.

Ellen's eyes, wandering from her cards to the group at the piano, owned the other woman's entire success in what she had tried to make of herself. She owned Violet's style, her liveliness, her beauty. And with a little subtle edge of pain, she owned the faint general resemblance between that beauty and her own blond coloring and tall stature. And the little hateful question, so often asked before, came back to her again: Was it perhaps only as the replica of this lost love of his that she had been chosen by Jim Palliser? She put the ugly thought out of sight. Was she growing morbid on the subject, to admit such a doubt to her mind at a time like this?

She was recalled to a realizing sense of the present situation, by noticing the bland determination with which Mr. Durham was losing

money to her. He was, doubtless, offering this slight salve to his own conscience and to her. A wild desire to laugh seized upon her. A pile of five-dollar bills, in return for the life of which he was robbing her?

CHAPTER III.

Jim Palliser's Story.

"Good night, Mrs. Palliser! Such a lovely time!"

The portières of the drawing-room swung to, over the trailing furs and sparkling diamonds. Ellen and her husband were left facing each other. She stood alert and watchful, steadying herself with one hand on the card-table. The other finger, laid on her lips, commanded silence till the whisper of draperies and the closing of doors should tell of their guests' final departure. From Jim's face, turned toward her, the light and the life had vanished like the dying flare of a fire. They stood gazing at each other, frightened to span for the first time with their bodily eyes the naked raw abyss torn open by their recent disembodied interview on the telephone.

Steps went rustling down the corridor, with a little murmur of voices. The outer door closed,

the latch clicked. With a flash of yellow draperies that sent Mr. Durham's greenbacks flying like leaves in a summer gale, Ellen leaped for her husband's neck.

"Jim, my darling Jim! You're alive! I have you—I have you!"

She whimpered like a child against his neck. For the moment her hard-drawn strength had snapped. The warmth she touched smote her indescribably, unbelievably, as though it were the flesh of her own new-born child. Her husband appeared to her a thing which at the risk of her own life she had snatched from the emptiness that lies beyond death. It seemed to her inconceivable that for so many smiling and terrible hours she had waited for the bliss of this reassuring touch.

"Jim! My own Jim!"

He soothed her tenderly. "Nelly—don't make me feel a brute! I know it, without seeing you like this. Come, be a thoroughbred! After the form you've showed this evening——"

She raised her head with a little strangling laugh. The break in her husband's voice brought

back to her the swift thought which a few hours ago had been hers: "I must be strong for two."

"Don't be afraid," she said steadily, "I'm not going to be silly. Come, Jim"—she turned toward the sofa, still clutching his shoulders with her hands—"come, tell me all about it, please!"

He seated himself at her side. The light falling on his face showed its blanched and sallow tints, and the new lines that had marked themselves below the restless eyes. With a sudden horrible thought her searching hands fell like water about his form.

"Jim! Have you got it on—now?"

"What?"

"The—the *you* know what!"

"The—revolver?"

She shuddered uncontrollably. "Don't say it. But of course, you've changed your clothes. Tell me—is it in the other room?"

"No, dear. I put the thing away, down at the bank. In a drawer of Mr. Durham's table, where I was sitting."

"Thank God! Dear Jim, you'll promise me that you'll leave it there?"

He smiled faintly. "If you'll promise me that you'll not go scorching out your dear little insides with a dose of carbolic."

"Don't talk about it, Jim, please!" Then her pale lips twitched in an answering smile. "What idiots we both were, weren't we? But what does that matter—now that we are really alive, really together? Whatever the dangers are, we'll fight them together, sha'n't we? But tell me! Tell me! How much longer do you think I can wait to hear what has happened?"

"The Patroons Trust is on its last legs, Nelly."

"What, the Patroons? The Patroons?"

Ellen Palliser, like every other New Yorker, regarded the Patroons Trust Company with an almost superstitious veneration. Its gray granite arches had come to be used as a very symbol of stability. That those arches could ever come down seemed incredible, a mere wanton perversion of nature.

"On its last legs or near it, my dear child. For the past three months, like everything else in New York, it's been tottering. Last week came the climax, and now, unless a scapegoat can be

found, there'll be a case of smash. Durham has my name on his paper. So in this case, I'm the scapegoat. Do you understand?"

Ellen's pale cheek glowed brightly. "And he dared to come here to-night—he *dared?*"

"Why not? Everything is very agreeable and polite between us. Even the hangman speaks to you politely before he puts the black cap over your head, doesn't he? Besides, I'm not supposed to be found out—yet." He laughed recklessly.

Jim Palliser, while richly endowed with the dashing courage which storms a redoubt in the face of overwhelming odds, was not of the nature fitted to stand a siege. He was of those born to win, rather than to hold. Gallantry, energy, initiative—there lay his strength. These are virtues which feed on hope. Deprived of hope, his soul starved and wilted.

Ellen, whose love read his strength and his weakness, knew that if this crisis were to be met only by patience and by steadfast faith, it must be she that would have to supply them. She raised his hand and pressed it to her cheek.

"Suppose you tell me all about it now," she said quietly.

"I'm not very likely, Nelly, to refuse to tell my story to the one person in New York who will believe me. Listen, Ellen—you remember a chap by the name of Henderson, that I brought up here to dine, one night last spring? Durham introduced him, and asked me to show him some attention—that was part of his game! You remember him?"

Ellen nodded. "Perfectly—a big man, with a red beard. He told dialect stories quite wonderfully, I remember, with a 'Gaul-dang it!' every other minute—and then apologies. Yes, I remember him, of course."

"B. K. Henderson!" returned Jim. "That's him! He was the promoter of the Achaguas Rubber Company, New York and Rio. They claimed to have a rubber tract down there on the Amazon that would make King Leopold himself sick with envy—pure virgin gum trickling right out into their pails. It looked pretty promising. The curb was fighting for it, and it was whispered that M—— himself had taken them up.

Durham was wild about it. Just before my promotion he took sixty-five thousand of their stock. I, of course, as his secretary, met Henderson and put through the deal. Then came my sudden promotion to cashier. I knew, of course, that my promotion was due to Durham. I didn't know then why!"

"Why, dear?" asked Ellen, while her heart turned cold with an indefinable fear.

"Listen, Nelly. I'd been cashier of the Patroons for three days when Durham came to me with a note of Henderson's to be discounted. The amount was ninety thousand. The collateral offered was Achaguas stock. Durham asked me to take these papers to the bookkeeper for him and have the loan credited to Henderson's account; and to certify checks for him on request. Why should I have refused? It was all in the day's work. So I initialed the note—with the usual memorandum—'Proceeds to be credited to account of B. K. Henderson, Signed, J. M. P.'—and passed it in. This happened a half dozen times again, till the total ran up to over a half million. It seemed to me a bit risky toward the

last, but it wasn't for me to question my chief. And besides, Achaguas was in the eighties, and Henderson dining with the Wall Street princes every night. Then on the top wave of prosperity, he was off to Rio to 'give his personal attention to the interests of his stockholders.' The first dividends had been paid on the dot. The second came due after Henderson had left. There was some delay in their payment. The bears got hold of Achaguas, and rushed it down eleven points. Then all of a sudden, last month—perhaps you noticed the head-lines, Nelly?"

"If I did I've forgotten them."

"Wrecked tugboat, somewhere about the mouth of the Amazon. Brilliant young New York financier, B. K. Henderson, eaten by sharks —ah, he was a cannibal, that shark that bit into Henderson! The days after the news came to hand, Achaguas Rubber came down with a run that beat Nipissing. And when the receivers took over the affairs of the company, they found nothing, Nelly, nothing at all either in New York or Brazil—not so much as a stray nickel or a wad of chewing-gum!"

Ellen was silent. Through these bewildering facts her mind groped to a certainty which she disowned. Then she spoke with difficulty:

"And Jim—those notes?"

"Those notes, my dear, have my initials on the back—those that haven't my name—and the collateral is worthless."

"But you signed them on Mr. Durham's responsibility!"

"His verbal responsibility. There were no witnesses except the bookkeeper who recorded them; and he, poor chap, died at Bellevue last month."

"But even if you were responsible, Jim, it would be only your misfortune, not your fault."

"A cashier's misfortune, when he accepts speculative stock as collateral, *is* his fault. And besides, there are always those vouchers for the purchase of that Achaguas stock—the stock I bought for Durham, the last week that I served as his private secretary."

"The vouchers stand—in your name, Jim?"

"They do. They prove that in April, 1907, James M. Palliser bought in sixty-five thousand

of a curb stock—the same curb stock which later, as cashier, he accepted as collateral for notes to the tune of a half million. These notes, which he initialed, were drawn all by the same man—the promoter of the very company in which the cashier was interested. A neat arrangement, you see! When the price rose, the cashier could release this collateral to his pal, and pull in the gain. If it fell——"

"And it did fall?" asked Ellen, with white lips.

"To smash, Ellen. When I went to Durham for satisfaction, he put me off. Finally to-day, as the quarterly balancing comes this week, I told him pointblank he'd have to account to the directors for the worthless collateral. It was then he called my attention to the points in the case, as I have just presented them to you."

"But I don't understand," gasped Ellen. "He made you responsible, from beginning to end, for his speculation. If it succeeded he would have reaped the profits. But now that it has failed, the responsibility rests on you!"

"Exactly, my dear. I'm not the first man in

New York to be used as catspaw for the back-door operations of a great financier. And if I suffer I'm not the first."

"But a great financier, Jim! How is it possible——"

"There's just the point, dear. At this present moment, Durham is hardly that. He's been badly hit by this past year's shrinkage in values. His wife spends money like an insane woman, as I happen to know—did you notice her diamonds, to-night? Besides that, several of his other investments have gone to smash. He's lost every penny, and owes into the hundred thousands. He's a desperate man, Nelly. This Achaguas venture was a last determined effort to recoup his losses. If the company had succeeded his gains would have been enormous. It failed, and the loss rests on the bank. The crime——"

Ellen jumped to her feet. Her lips were parted in a whispering cry that cut the air like a scream.

"But, Jim, even though these documents put the burden of Mr. Durham's operations on you, it's no more than a financial trick. It's not a crime they prove—not a crime!"

"Conspiracy and misapplication of funds, my dear, form the ground of a criminal charge. A man indicted on this charge is tried in the criminal court."

There was a moment's silence. Ellen spoke with difficulty.

"But you, Jim—you're an innocent man!"

Her faith shone in her eyes, superb and undoubting. Had she found her husband with a smoking pistol beside a new corpse, she would have taken his word for his innocence. Palliser paused, wet his lip, and surveyed her kindling features with a curious expression of doubt before he responded.

"For you, Nelly. But for the bank examiners, when they overhaul my books and inspect my balance? Any day now, their visit may be due. What will they say to the half-million shortage —and to the Henderson notes, initialed by Palliser?"

Ellen drew a long hard breath. "Have you seen a lawyer?"

"Yes, but not Belden, this time. I went straight to Lichenstein—two hundred dollars for

ten minutes' talk. He tried to get me to admit 'the truth' to him. 'What's the use of this kind of talk to your lawyer, Mr. Palliser?' he said."

"I understand." Ellen controlled the trembling of her lips. "And then?"

"And then, back to Durham for the last time. This time he spoke more openly. It was a question, he said, of the greatest good of the greatest number; of sacrificing individual feelings for the safety of the institution we both served. I'll not deny, there was truth in what he said. At such a time as this, with our deposits subject to call, running to thirty times our reserve; with business failures in every quarter of the city, and a feeling of distrust in the very air—what must be the result for the company, if the cashier's name were kept out of the Henderson transaction?

"For in the absence of direct proof against me, Nelly, you understand that Durham as president is personally responsible for all paper discounted by the bank and all loans made. Suppose it came to light that the president had lent a half million of the bank's money to a wildcat company that he

held stock in, and lost it—what could the result be, but a total collapse of the company's credit? The president, Nelly, do you understand? He's the institution itself! Whereas, the cashier—why, a cashier isn't even expected to keep his trust! By all the rules of modern finance and journalism, every cashier is guilty of embezzlement until he's proved innocent. The discovery that the Patroons Trust had shared the common lot of banks might create a brief embarrassment, but the institution would be safe. The funds of the depositors would be safe, which must be a banker's first care. So, as it was a choice of president and depositors against the cashier, the cashier must be content to suffer."

"For the guilty," said Ellen, in a low voice.

"That's about the size of it. For who can prove Durham guilty, but Henderson? And poor old B. K., if he's not dead, is a hunted fugitive on the face of the earth; a common defaulter like—like *me*. For in the eyes of the law, dear Nelly, that's what I am, while those papers exist to prove my guilt. Do you wonder, now, that after turning the thing over in my mind this eve-

ning, I told the watchman that I'd have to come back for some extra work after hours, and then went around the corner and bought——"

"No, Jim, don't say it!" Her warm hand was over his mouth. "The thing to think of now," she said clearly, "is what we are going to do about it!"

He shook his head in a sort of sad pride at her undaunted spirit. "When the cleverest lawyer in New York rejected the business as a bad job," he said, with a short laugh, "I'm afraid the outlook is hardly encouraging, Nelly, for amateur talent like yours and mine."

"But there must be!" she insisted. "The point is this, as I understand it: there's money embezzled, and documentary evidence which goes to prove you the embezzler. Very well. The first question is: Can we get hold of the documents?"

The bright blood leaped into Palliser's handsome face. "If we could!" he said in a kind of purposeful concentration.

"They form the sole evidence, Jim, that you had anything to do with the loans to Henderson?"

"The only evidence."

"But the witnesses to your signature, Jim!" Ellen knit her brows. "Even if the notes themselves were destroyed mightn't it still be proved by witnesses that you initialed Henderson's notes, and had them recorded?"

"Only one witness as I told you, Nelly; the bookkeeper that recorded them—and he's dead, poor chap."

"I see. Then if we could get hold of those notes with your initials, and of the Achaguas vouchers with your name on them, there'd be no case whatever against you?"

"Absolutely none. But unhappily, my dear child, the papers in question exist, and are locked in Mr. Durham's private safe."

Ellen knit her brows. "Very well, then, we'll eliminate the impossible, as the books say. The second and last question is: Can we replace the money?"

He smiled grimly. "Money that Durham spent, and Henderson is spending!"

"That doesn't matter!" she cried. "We aren't talking of abstract justice—we aren't talking of

what ought to be done. We're talking of what's *got* to be done!"

"For me to replace the money would be to acknowledge that I had stolen it."

"Perhaps so, to those who don't know the circumstances. But to Mr. Durham? Valuable as a scapegoat would be to him, I'm sure cash would be better."

"Very possibly, but where's the use of talking, Nelly, when I haven't the cash? Hardly a tenth part of it? And what would that be, to Durham?"

Ellen sat silent, while purpose grew and flamed in her eyes. "There's no knowing, till one tries! If the trust company is really in difficulties, then ready money would take on an added value."

"If I had it! But I haven't, and that's all there is about it."

"But I?"

Jim Palliser turned in sudden anger. "My dear child, stop right there! I may be a poor sort of beggar—I dare say I am, to have messed things up like this—but I'm damned if I'll see you impoverishing yourself, and flying about

town trying to raise money to pay into the maw of a hoary-headed old scoundrel like Durham!"

He dropped his chin in his hand. For the moment, his handsome face looked quite broken and weary. Ellen touched his cheek timidly with her hand.

"But, dearest—when I refused to let you—get out of it in the way you thought best—surely it's my right to help you now?"

"Thank you, dear Nelly. I feel your goodness, your nobility. But even if I could accept what you offer it would be a mere drop in the bucket. No—something has got to be done, I own, but not *that.*"

"But, Jim, you'll not lose heart again? You'll fight? You'll do something now—now before it's too late?"

Palliser glanced up sharply. His recent impulse had been despair. But now the warm touch of a kind hand, the sound of a voice that had faith and confidence in him, gave him if not hope at least a fresh access of his own *eager* energy. He brought his clenched hand down upon his knee.

"Nelly, I'll do what I can. I'll leave no stone unturned, no wire unpulled, to beat Durham's little game. Fair means or foul, I'll do him before he does me. In self-defense, a man can shoot to kill if he needs, can't he? Isn't that the law?"

The reckless determination of the words touched Ellen in a fierce glow of relief and of hope. "That's the law!" she cried. "Fight fire with fire!"

He started, then looked down into her face. "I believe you're right, Nelly," he said slowly. "I believe that you are very right."

CHAPTER IV.

Ellen's Sacrifice.

Next morning, Jim Palliser went down-town early. His reckless determination of the night before had given place to a kind of energetic despair. He still talked briskly, over the breakfast-table, of seeing lawyers and formulating schemes. But his dull tone and bitten lips told that hope was at a low ebb within him. For his wife's sake, and in mortification at the weak part he had played last evening, he spoke with a resolution which the expression of his face did not warrant. He talked with a freedom of confidence, an elaboration of detail, that they both recognized as unusual for the preoccupied financier. Yet, as he himself declared, he could not deny himself the luxury of discussing his trouble with the one person in the city who would accept his account of it. He recurred to the fact of his innocence; insisted upon it, proved it over and over again with an ardor and attention to detail

which his audience was far from requiring of him. Again and again he repeated his protestation:

"I'm an innocent man—you believe me, Nelly?"

"I don't believe you, dear—I *know*."

"Ah! That's good!" He drew a long breath, as though her faith were the vital air. "And now, I must be off. Good-by, Nelly, dear!"

"Good-by, Jim. Good luck!"

She kissed him with a passionate tenderness. "Don't worry, darling!" he said. The words were brief; when so much was felt, it seemed unnecessary to use words. Their common life, for the moment, was fused in one desperate fear.

For Ellen the day passed slowly. The necessity of action thrilled in her veins like the headlong fumes of wine. What to do? What to do?

She sat down at her solitary lunch-table, but could not eat. She had no time to waste in eating. There was something for her to do. But what was it that she must do? The fear that had come into her life, the dread that lay over her, seemed fantastic, remote. Yet no one knew bet-

ter than she its present peril. A newspaper, lying still on the chair beside her, caught her eyes. She picked it up—one of the head-lines glared at her. "Daring Fraud by Clever Bank Officer." The coincidence struck her with a kind of rage. She threw the paper on the floor. What would she be reading to-morrow?

In the afternoon she dressed herself and went to see Belden at his office in the Flatiron Building. In spite of what her husband had said last night, she had decided to see what she could do in the way of raising money.

She had, to be sure, no private fortune of her own, which could for an instant begin to fill the gap. But she thought she saw ways and means. Breathlessly she recounted to the lawyer the resources which, she thought, might be counted upon to raise an adequate sum.

"Tell me, Mr. Belden," she said swiftly, "would the full amount be necessary? If we could raise one half the amount, for instance, mightn't the ready cash be of sufficient value, at such a time as this, to buy Durham over?"

Belden sucked in his breath reflectively. "Mrs.

Palliser, there's something in what you say. A couple of hundred thousand cold cash, judicially spread out, might be used to cover the hole left by three times that amount—at least, long enough to tide over this crisis. Then of course when values go up again—h'm, I can't be certain, but I admit there's a chance—if you can raise the cash!"

"I've been calculating," she cried, with fierce eagerness. "Now listen to me, Mr. Belden."

Swiftly she unfolded to the lawyer the various sources from which she looked to gather together the necessary cash.

To begin with, there was Palliser's own block of stock in the trust company which he served. With the shares at par, it represented fifty thousand dollars—its sacrifice would perhaps help to keep them there. The gold bonds that Ellen had inherited from her mother would bring in twelve thousand more; her savings from her housekeeping allowance, added to that, would bring the whole amount up to nearly sixty-five thousand. Then her jewels——

"What!" interrupted Belden. "You mean to

say, you are thinking of sacrificing your jewels, Mrs. Palliser?"

"For my husband, Mr. Belden!" she returned, with a look of wonder.

Then, as the recounted figures warmed her almost to hope, her face broke into open smiles as she told how Tiffany had once offered fifteen thousand for her collection of topazes, that had come to her from her mother; the diamonds that Jim had given her last summer had cost five thousand, at least, she knew that. Then there were her rings, and pearls her uncle had given her when she was a little girl. Altogether, the collection should be worth anywhere from thirty to forty thousand. This would bring the amount of ransom up to a hundred thousand, wouldn't it?

Then, as Belden opened his mouth to question, she stopped him with a gesture of the hand and swept on. Beside this, there were her laces—she had some fine old convent Malines, that had never even been in the market. There were the furnishings of their flat—had Belden ever noticed their Meissoniers? Her father had bought them from the artist himself as a beginner—they must

now be worth ten thousand apiece, at the least. Then their old family furniture, their silver, all their wedding-presents——

"Stop, stop!" cried Belden, moved for once almost out of his professional calm. "Mrs. Palliser, do you know what you are doing? You're stripping yourself. You'll stand in your clothes like an immigrant arrived at Hoboken. Will Palliser accept such a sacrifice?"

"He won't be consulted, Mr. Belden," returned Ellen, with spirit. "And now, let us keep to business if you please. Even at forced sale, I have calculated that those things ought to bring in fifty thousand more. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Belden!" She squeezed her gloved hands together in her lap, and her blue eyes looked at him imploringly.

He shook his head. "To fill the hole left by a half million? That's the heart-breaking part about your courageous sacrifice, Mrs. Palliser."

"Oh, but there's something more." She flushed painfully. Her tongue seemed to drag itself over the words as she explained to Belden her hopes of raising money on an inheritance

which was some day to come to her. There was a certain old uncle whose property, chiefly in real estate along the Hudson, was some day to be hers. This uncle, who was a member of the Reformed Dutch Church, had never approved of Palliser; it would be useless to approach him with a plea to give a helping hand to a son of Belial like his niece's husband. Ellen was, however, his acknowledged heiress.

She stopped, flushed, and hesitated. It made her sick to think of speculating on the life of some one who had always been so good to her, but, but—didn't people do things like that, sometimes? Weren't loans of ready money sometimes made to heirs, on post-obits or whatever they were called?

In reply to Belden's questions she gave, in a faltering voice, details as to her uncle's age, his health and habits, etc. Shame filled her. Nothing but the passionate necessity that urged her on could have moved her to a calculation so sordid and so cold. She was giving the uttermost proof in her power of her devotion to the man whose name she bore.

Belden shook his head. The business was hardly to his liking. Nevertheless, for friends —— He knitted his brows over the facts and figures that he had jotted down. H'm—between three and four hundred thousand in real estate? He would speak, this very afternoon, with a little Jew who made a business of such loans. It was possible, Mrs. Palliser might get a cash advance of a hundred thousand.

"By the way, Mrs. Palliser, there's a tremendous interest charged for such accommodation. It will probably swallow up the whole of your inheritance, when it falls in."

Ellen waved the objection aside with her hand. "What does *that* matter if I can have the money to-morrow—day after to-morrow?"

"Possibly. I will do my best."

"Not your best—you must *do* it!" cried Ellen imploringly. "I can wait a day or two for the money, but I must know to-morrow whether I can have it or not. I can't wait any longer to get those papers from Mr. Durham. Suppose the examiners were to come to-morrow, even!"

She paled at the thought. Belden glanced at

her with a puzzled air. Though he was himself, in a calm metropolitan fashion, much attached to the attractive Jim Palliser, still he was rather nonplused by this unquestioning faith in the cashier's innocence.

"We'll have to take our risks of that. Still, I think we need not worry about to-morrow. And I give you my word, I'll rush the business and do my best to let you know by the middle of the afternoon."

"How can I thank you, Mr. Belden? And I'll attend to the other things myself. I'll make out my lists to-night, and send for people to come and make the valuations to-morrow morning early. But no—not too early. Jim doesn't leave the house till nine."

"Ah! Then you aren't intending to tell Jim?"

She turned eyes of amazement upon him.

"Do you suppose I'd be allowed to do it if I told?"

He smiled gently at her serene confidence, which he found touching. Her next remark, however, was less pleasant to him.

"And if we find that we can do it—if I find

that I can raise what we hope on the things at home, and you find you can get the hundred thousand on poor Uncle Robert's estate—then you'll go to Mr. Durham to-morrow afternoon, at once? You'll tell him that he can have the money at once—and Jim's stock, and those bonds of mine —two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash, ready cash, if he'll give up those wicked lying documents that he swindled out of poor Jim? Though you needn't put it that way—put it politely, Mr. Belden, of course."

The lawyer rose to his feet. Something in the expression of his thin face as he looked down at her caused her suddenly to stop. Then she added tentatively:

"For you'll take charge of the business for me, won't you?"

Belden hesitated. "I'll do what I can to raise the money for you, Mrs. Palliser. Yes, though it's not quite in my line, I'll do my best, I assure you."

"But when the money is raised," she insisted, "you'll go and see Mr. Durham, won't you?"

His narrow eyes as they rested on her had in

them an expression which she did not understand. "What do you mean, Mr. Belden?"

He spoke with embarrassment. "Listen, Mrs. Palliser, I'm your friend, yours and your husband's, I hope. But in this case, it's not as your friend but as your lawyer that you come to me—do I understand you rightly?"

She stared, a little repelled. "Certainly, Mr. Belden. This is a professional service I ask of you. I'm a woman, but I understand business as far as *that,* I hope."

"Mrs. Palliser, I beg you not to think that *that* was what I meant."

She bent her brows at him. "Then, in Heaven's name——"

"Mrs. Palliser," he said in a desperate awkwardness, "if I am to be your representative in this matter, if I am to treat with your opponent for you, don't you see that it is necessary, before we go to work, to decide—to decide——"

"To decide what?" she cried. Something in his manner frightened her.

"To decide on exactly what basis we are to treat."

"What do you mean, Mr. Belden?" It was the expression of his face as he regarded her, rather than his spoken words, which conveyed his meaning to her. She spoke in a changed voice, low and uncertain.

"You mean, Mr. Belden, you don't believe—you don't believe that Jim is innocent?"

"My dear Mrs. Palliser, what an idea!" returned the lawyer briskly. In spite of the painfulness of the situation, his relief at her final understanding was obvious. "My own personal opinion, as Jim's friend—I'm not speaking of that. But as a practical man, Mrs. Palliser——"

"Yes?" In spite of Jim's warning of yesterday, she had not till this moment realized the binding and subtle nature of the chains in which he was held. For the moment she felt the chains entangling about her as well—her, the one person in New York, as he had said, who could believe in him! If Belden did not believe, there was nothing she could do to make him believe. She drew a long breath upon a heart that pounded so painfully as almost to deprive her of speech.

"As a practical man, Mr. Belden? Please to speak plainly."

"Then, Mrs. Palliser, I must acknowledge that if you ask me to go to such a person as Mr. Durham, of the Patroons Trust Company, and approach him on the basis that he is guilty of blackmail, embezzlement of funds, and wilful perjury —then I say frankly that such a thing is impossible. If, however, you allow me to use my own judgment, in the attempt to buy those papers from him——"

"To buy the papers, that is, as genuine proofs of a genuine crime on Jim's part?" She was very pale now, and her voice came slowly. Belden's distress was on the surface nearly equal to her own.

"My dear Mrs. Palliser, what a way to put it! To risk trust funds in a little speculation—Good Lord, if you call *that* a crime, Wall Street ought to be moved bodily to Sing Sing! It's only when the thing fails that it becomes dangerous—and surely that's bad luck rather than crime, isn't it?"

"I see what you mean, Mr. Belden. Please don't bother to explain any more."

She rose to her feet, pulling up the brown ostrich boa that had slipped from her shoulders. The gallant resolution of her pale face struck again that little pang of pity from the lawyer's heart, and he did not begrudge her her obstinate faith. Though, by a curious oblique movement of his subconscious self, it was this unstinted devotion which gave the final touch to his belief in his friend's guilt. "It's only the scamps that have a woman like this, ready to strip herself of her last rag for them"—so the voice of his experience told him. The wife's devoted faith, instead of moving him, merely confirmed him in his judgment of James Palliser.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Palliser. I'd be glad to serve you to the best of my ability, if you'd let me."

"Thank you, Mr. Belden." To accept one iota of his aid, after the opinion he had expressed, seemed a humiliation intolerable. But for her husband's sake she overcame her pride, as in the first part of the interview she had her sense of family honor. "Then you'll try and get the

money for me? And you'll let me know, to-morrow afternoon, whether you have succeeded?"

"I will. And I'll do my best to have it good news for you."

"Then you'll call me up after lunch?"

"In any case, I'll call you up then and report progress. But—what about Mr. Durham?"

"Mr. Durham?" With a hand that trembled slightly, she twitched her veil into place. "Oh, I'll go to see Mr. Durham myself. Good-by, Mr. Belden."

Once in the street she hailed a hansom. It was perilously near five o'clock and she feared to be late for her appointment at Sherry's. Besides, the shock of her recent interview had set her knees to trembling under her. But when she was seated in the cab, she had a little reaction of self-blame for her extravagance. At such a time as this, every penny was precious! Eagerly her mind ran forward in plans of economy for the future.

In her schemes for her husband's release from the peril that threatened him she found an energy

of consolation that almost wiped from her mind the recent shock of Belden's doubt. What did Belden's opinion matter, so long as he could get her the money she needed? By the time that her crawling vehicle, in its dot-and-go-one progress up the crowded Avenue, had gone its twenty blocks, she was almost in spirits again. Save Jim! With the ready cash which, please Heaven, she would have almost in her hand to-morrow, of course she would save him!

Though the hands of the clock in the dressing-room, as she entered it, stood at five after five, Charlotte Swanwick had not yet come. After a brief settling of hat and hair, Ellen took her seat in the outer hall. For the first time in her life she viewed the moving show of clothes and of smiling faces in a curious sense of her own detachment. Even the words of one or two acquaintances, as they passed, hardly confirmed in her mind the reality and rightfulness of her place among this gaiety and elegance. Her place was among the workers of the world; for the first time in her life she realized that, and without a

qualm of regret or of repugnance. If she could only save Jim, then for the rest of her life she would live in a cheap suburb, and cook her own dinner and his, with the greatest pleasure in life.

There was a touch on her elbow. Mrs. Swanwick's little sharp face smiled down into hers.

"Ellen! You little animated flying-machine! How in Heaven's name did you get here so quickly?"

Ellen stared as she rose to follow her friend into the tea-room. "Quarter after five! And I've been waiting for you ten minutes!"

"Ten minutes!" cried her friend, with a puzzled air. "But didn't I see you and your husband at the Waldorf, ten or fifteen minutes ago? That was the reason, you see, that I took my time about coming up here!"

Ellen stared. "Jim and me? No!"

"But I certainly saw your husband," persisted her friend as they seated themselves at the little table reserved for them among the chattering, staring crowd.

With her reaction of confidence, Ellen's color

had come back into her cheeks, and under her wide brown-plumed hat, her shining eyes and hair made a picture which more than one tea-drinker found worth surveying. Her mind, however, was busy appraising, calculating, planning. Even while she listened to Mrs. Swanwick's news of Jim himself, or while she gave the waiter her order, her mind was straining toward tomorrow's interview with the man who held her very life in his hand. She controlled herself, however, to an appearance of interest.

"Yes, Ceylon, you said, Charlotte, didn't you? Waiter, two pots of Ceylon tea, with cream. And English muffins, toasted. And so you saw Jim at the Waldorf, Charlotte. He often goes in there for a moment in the afternoon—it's so close to his office, you see. But tell me, what put it into your head that I was with him?"

Charlotte drew down her little sharp face disarmingly. "Why, I just saw him for a flash, tearing through the Palm Room. And I thought I caught a glimpse of you in the offing—however, in a crowd like that one can never tell who's who

or who's *with* whom! So as you weren't there, after all, it's luck that I came up here in time, isn't it! Oh, my dearest girl, do look around—there, the next table but one. Did you ever in your life see such a guy of a hat?"

CHAPTER V.

The Visit of the Money-lenders.

Ellen's next day was a busy one. She told her husband merely of her intention to reduce their establishment, a plan to which he gave a regretful though ready assent. His attitude was hardly more hopeful than yesterday. Occasional bursts of feverish gaiety, in which he maintained the certainty of his escape, alternated with moods of gloom which frightened Ellen almost into telling him of her schemes. Nothing but the certainty of his imperative veto on her plans could have kept her enthusiasm silent. As it was, she smiled at him and caressed him with a passionate encouragement.

"Don't be downhearted, dearest! We're going to get out of this—I feel it! I know it! Something is going to happen—you'll see if I'm not right! You'll see!"

He jumped from the breakfast-table to walk

restlessly up and down the room. Ellen noticed with anxiety that his chop and coffee remained untasted; and his handsome face had taken on the wasted look of one aged twenty years in the last two days.

Ellen rose from her chair and taking him by the shoulders, forced him into his seat again. "Sit down," she said imperiously. "You don't suppose I'm going to have you ill on my hands, do you? Eat your breakfast!"

He laughed faintly as he attacked his chop. "You're a good-plucked one, Nelly," he said. "Yes, if only to do what I do to deserve you, I'll go down to the office and do what I can to-day. As I say, there's a bare chance——"

"Jim!" Ellen interrupted him with a sudden thought. "Are you going to be at the Patroons all day?"

He stared at her. "At the office all day?" he repeated, hesitating. "How should I know, my dear? And why should you want to know?"

Her approaching interview with Mr. Durham was in Ellen's mind. At all hazards, her purpose must be kept secret until its success was assured.

And she shrank nervously from meeting possible opposition at the last moment, by coming face to face with her husband in the office of the trust company itself. When her proposed sacrifice had secured its end, and she could give her explanation along with the incriminating papers themselves, there would be time enough to tell the truth to her husband.

"If I should want to telephone you about anything, you know!" she said, with a little nervous laugh.

He nodded slowly. "Of course. Well, you'll find me at the office any time this morning. In the afternoon I'll probably be out; in the late afternoon, certainly so."

"The same as yesterday," she answered, with a laugh. "Charlotte told me she saw you at the Waldorf!"

"I thought I saw her," he answered calmly. "I dropped in at the billiard-room a moment, to have a highball with a chap who's on here from the West. Good God, Nelly!" he broke out in a sudden explosion of nervous agony. "Do you realize what kind of a life this is we're living?

Talk about your *morituri!* Here we are giving dinners, going down-town, going through all the motions, down to highballs and chops and coffee!" With a fierce gesture he flung out his hand, so that his coffee-cup went crashing to the floor. The delicate china was shattered, the black liquid went meandering destructively over the rug. The speaker pulled himself together. "I'm an ass," he said hurriedly, "ranting this way, as though I were on the stage! But when I look at you, and think what the chances are—Nelly, I'm going to do my best to-day! The chances are so slim that they're hardly worth mentioning, but I'll do my best."

"Tell me, dearest," she said, with curiosity, "what it is that you are going to do?"

He hesitated. "What's the use?" he said slowly. "If I can get hold of the papers, or block Durham's game some way, then will be the time to tell you. But till then—no, Nelly, let me alone. I'll do my best and a little more, I'll promise you."

He rose from his seat with the slow heavy motion of one physically spent. She leaned

across the little table with hands outstretched for a caress.

"And I'll do my best," she said, with a smile of bright determination. "Together we're going to get you out of this hole, you know, Jim."

He kissed her finger-tips. "What a girl you are," he said, with affection. "You're the one to stick by a man when he's down! A real thoroughbred—didn't I always say so?"

The moment that the door had closed upon her husband's slow step, Ellen flew to the telephone. That part of the business arranged, she set herself with furious energy to the preparation of her lists. By noon she had in her apartment a half dozen persons such as she had never received there before—hook-nosed, shiny-hatted individuals, who talked with each other in confidential whispers, with backward jerks of the thumb. Ellen shivered with a sense of her own temerity as she regarded them. For her they symbolized, outwardly and visibly, the break between the familiar past and the unknown future which on her own responsibility she was creating.

Her silver and her jewels, spread out in glittering rows on the dining-room table, were overhauled and appraised. Her pictures were examined with a microscope, her rugs—including the Kurdistan in the dining-room, from which the coffee-stain of the morning had been carefully cleansed—were thumbed and discussed.

Nikeda stood by with an impenetrable face. This was the first time that he had witnessed such a phenomenon; but the cook, who thrust a frowsy head in from behind the leather screen at the pantry door, had enlightened him. From the eyes of both, immediate warning glittered in terms of cold contempt. Little Armandine had already called up an employment-office and filed her application for a new place.

These signs of domestic disruption, however, passed unnoticed before Ellen's eyes. If she had thought of her servants at all, it was only to reproach herself that she had ever indulged in so luxurious an establishment; and if they would save her further expense by leaving voluntarily before the end of their month, so much the better. Their scorn passed high over her head; as

did also the pain of beholding stubby fingers, yellow with cigarette smoke, poking among her mother's silver, and her own precious collection of lace. Or if she felt any pain she hugged it to her soul in a kind of triumph.

The greatest privilege that a man can afford the woman who loves him is to allow her the opportunity of unlimited sacrifice in his behalf. In the thrill of this new and unaccustomed delight, Ellen almost exulted in the sordidness of the present trial, in the poverty-stricken bareness of the days that stretched before her. One thought only was in her ears like music, before her eyes like a golden haze: the vision of that moment when, perhaps that very day, she might possibly—possibly—be telling her husband that he was safe, and that she had saved him.

It was three o'clock before the visitors departed. The apartment looked as though a strong wind had blown through it; and there was no lunch cooked, owing to the fact of the cook having put on her bonnet and gone out to solace herself with a drink and the hunt for a new place. Ellen, however, sang to herself as, with the aid

of the disdainful Armandine, she replaced the silver and jewels in their safe, and finally sat down to the fragments of cold beef served to her by Nikeda. What did it matter, discomfort, humiliation, poverty? So long as the result of the ordeal just passed through was to assure her that her own estimate of values had been if anything a conservative one. To-morrow, if she chose to call up her recent visitors on the telephone, she was assured of something over ninety thousand dollars for her fund. Now, if Mr. Belden had succeeded—she glanced at the clock. Her bread and butter stuck in her throat. What news would he have for her? And if he had the news she hoped, what success would she have in the dreaded interview which possibly lay before her?

Her irritation was further increased by a continual ringing of the telephone. It seemed that every one she knew in the city was planning a dinner, and wanted her and her husband to come; or wanted her name as patroness, for theatricals in aid of their pet charity; or had a choice bit of gossip to retail, or an inquiry about the tailor

who had made her that love of a brown suit. Ellen glanced at the helpless instrument on her toilet-table, as though all this frivolity were as much its fault as had seemed the tragic message of two nights ago.

Finally, when the hands of the little silver clock stood at half-past four, the bell rang again. This time, at last, the click of the joining wires was followed by Belden's voice.

"It's all right, Mrs. Palliser!"

Ellen's voice rose to something like a cry. "Mr. Belden! You mean—you have the money for me?"

"I can get it for you to-morrow. There's a dirty little Jew down on Tenth Street—a fellow you wouldn't kick—who will make the advance on the security that you offer. I'm bound to tell you that the rate he asks will probably have eaten up the whole business by the time the inheritance falls in——"

"As though that mattered! How much does he offer?"

"The sum you asked for—a hundred thousand."

"Thank God!"

The receiver almost dropped from her shaking hand. For a moment she was conscious of the grotesque incongruity of these violent emotions which, for the past few days, had been associated for her with this intrusive instrument of nickel and wire. To weep over a telephone seems absurd, yet two great tears of relief fell from Ellen's eyes and splashed on the shining toy over which she bent. The chirping echo of Belden's voice was in her ears:

"Then you still intend to go to Durham?"

"Certainly," she replied in a sudden unavoidable coldness. She knew in what unbelief the question was asked.

"I hope with all my heart you'll find him—reasonable. Mrs. Palliser, tell me—do you want the deal closed at once?"

"No, not till I have seen Mr. Durham. If he won't listen to me where would be the use?"

"That's true. Call me up when you know for certain, and you can have the cash to-morrow."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Belden. I will."

"That's all right. Good-by, and good luck!"

Ellen replaced the receiver and rang for her maid. "Armandine, call up the Plaza, and tell them to send me a taximeter immediately. Then help me to dress quickly—as quickly as you can!"

With the aid of her cynical, half-doubting maid, Ellen flung herself into her clothes. The certain poverty and humiliation which she faced seemed to her now not only unregretted but a delicious thing; it was the price of the triumph which at the moment coursed through her veins with the exhilaration of a wild cross-country run. She had the money, the means through which she might attain her end, the weapon with which she must fight.

Before her lay her opportunity. It seemed to her that all the spirit in her, all the wit and all the courage, rose up to meet it. Her senses were exalted to a supernatural acuteness. As her busy brain swiftly dramatized the coming interview it seemed to her that she really heard Durham's voice in reply, and saw the loose skin of his bald forehead wrinkle itself majestically.

With a sudden thought of fear lest, after all, her husband should be at the office to catch a

glimpse of her, she swathed her head and hat together in concealing yards of thick brown chiffon. Then, snatching her purse from the demure Armandine, she almost ran to the elevator, and to the waiting taximeter below.

CHAPTER VI.

The Sacrifice Accepted.

Behind the outer offices of the Patroons, with their gilded gratings and marble colonnades, stretched a broad low corridor with its entrance on the side street. Through this side door, and over the padded Turkey carpet of the corridor, was approached the inner citadel of the Money-Power which these walls enshrined.

Ellen's heart beat quick as, conducted by an obsequious young man in uniform, she walked with soundless steps toward the reception-room. Unlike many women, she had never made a practise of frequenting her husband's office. Therefore she had to give her name to the attendant; and her eye went with a thrill of surprise, as to something seen for the first time, toward the legend, "Mr. Palliser," that stared at her from one of the closed doors she passed.

"Will you please take a seat, madam? I'm sorry, Mr. Durham's regular boy has been sent

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down-stairs on an errand to the vaults; and I ain't got any list of his appointments. Was he expecting you, madam?"

"No, but I can wait if I need to. Here is my card."

The young man glanced at the card, ducked his head in a salute which Ellen, in an oblique flash of satisfaction, took as a kind of tribute to her husband; then disappeared. For a few moments she was left alone to watch the orderly comings and goings in the oak-paneled corridor without; the sleek, hawk-eyed visitors and pale darting clerks. The great clock in the corner of the reception-room ticked loudly, overbearing the faint hum of passing voices.

Ellen swallowed hard. It seemed to her that her eyes must be starting from her head in the violence of her effort to compose herself. She remembered the day of her wedding and the fit of unreasoning terror which, a few moments before driving to the church, had overtaken her. She remembered the day when she had stood, hour by hour, outside her mother's door, waiting till the surgeons should give her the word of hope

that never came. Those bygone terrors seemed dignified and almost beautiful beside the torturing ugliness of the ordeal which now awaited her. She buttoned and unbuttoned the glove of her left hand, in an endless gesture of nervousness which her best resolution could not control. And in her hurrying brain she rehearsed, rehearsed endlessly the coming interview.

"Mr. Durham will see you now, Mrs. Palliser. Will you please walk this way?"

The financier rose majestically to receive her. Power was in his air. Here in his own sanctum, with the great institution that he controlled all about him, her errand seemed to Ellen even more impossible than it had done before. Still, it must be done. Even the thought that here in this room her husband had so nearly met his death—even that thought must be driven back, together with the remembrance of the little deadly instrument which still, for all she knew, lay in one of these table-drawers.

"This is a great pleasure, Mrs. Palliser. It is not often that my poor office is so favored. Even my wife never comes here."

"Really?" murmured Ellen politely, casting about in her mind for a sentence with which to begin her desperate errand.

Mr. Durham stroked his double chin reflectively. "And when one thinks what a little business woman she used to be!" It was plain that, even at the pains of discussing his own family affairs, he was willing to avert the discussion which he saw facing him from Ellen's set features. "Though, as I was telling you the other night, Mrs. Palliser, she continues to give me her aid in so many practical details of my work. Ah, she's a wonder, that little girl of mine!"

For an instant he sat silent, lost in sentimental dreaming which sat oddly on his hard old face. Then rousing himself:

"Well, well, Mrs. Palliser, and what can I do for you? Business, or pleasure?"

Ellen pushed up her veil and surveyed the speaker steadily. In her pale face and flaming eyes he read her errand. And his face stiffened to meet the intensity of hers.

"So James has told you, Mrs. Palliser," he said quietly.

She nodded, gathering her forces. Even while showing him that she knew the truth of his treachery, she must conceal her loathing of it. For the sake of the end she hoped to gain, she must hide her horror both of this man and of his hypocrisy. She answered steadily, with a peculiar emphasis which might make her meaning unmistakable:

"He has told me everything, Mr. Durham—*everything.*"

The rugged face before her melted suddenly; but not into lines of shame—rather, into a deep and grieved pity.

"Poor James!" said Mr. Durham.

"What?" cried Ellen. Then, recovering herself, she spoke with sudden resolution: "I said, Mr. Durham, that he told me everything!"

"And yet," returned the president, with a gentle dignity, "you find it as hard to condemn him as I do myself."

Ellen rose in her chair. The blood sang in her ears. Even the knowledge which Jim had conveyed to her, of this man's cold-blooded duplicity, had failed to prepare her for this.

"Mr. Durham," she said in a voice that thrilled like a smitten wire, "don't you understand what I mean when I tell you Jim has told me the truth?"

"I do," he retorted mildly. "That unhappy business of the Achaguas Rubber. Your husband is not the first man who has fallen before such temptation, Mrs. Palliser—and lost."

Ellen stood staring at him. For the first time in her life her body knew the stirrings of that savage impulse which moves the hands to pass from the control of the spirit, and to deal out death. Had it been in her power, at that instant she would have crushed out that large, bland face, raised so benignantly toward her own. Then she began to laugh.

"Mr. Durham," she said, "why do you take the trouble to talk that way with me? Don't you see, I know who it was that dragged the bank into that Achaguas affair? Don't you see, I know how it was that Jim's name came on those vouchers and those notes?"

She paused, panting. She had fired her shot. What would be the result?

"YOUR HUSBAND IS NOT THE FIRST MAN WHO HAS FALLEN BEFORE SUCH TEMPTATION—AND LOST."

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From the dignified face before her the gentle pity was suddenly wiped out, and a stern amazement took its place. Before her she saw no longer the friend but the official.

"Mrs. Palliser," he said abruptly, "I see that there is something more in this business than I understand. Do you mind telling me, fully and circumstantially, exactly what your husband has told you about this affair?"

Ellen's head whirled. Armed with the truth, she had expected at the one shot to penetrate the flimsy shell of pretense that she faced. And now not only had her attack failed, but she found suddenly that it was she herself who was on the defensive. In a moving flash of her spirit, she saw the absurdity of refusing to accept the situation as it was presented to her. After all, she was in the power of the unscrupulous schemer before her as completely as was her husband.

In a low voice, but undaunted, she rehearsed to the listening magnate the story of his own treachery, exactly as it had been related to her by his victim.

She concluded. There was a dead pause.

From the street without came the rattle of wheels and the ceaseless honk of the passing motor-cars. The telephone at Durham's elbow tinkled shrilly. He took it up, promised to see the inquirer in fifteen minutes, laid it down again.

In spite of her resolution, Ellen felt slightly faint. By her insistence on the truth, had she bungled matters beyond mending? Would she be turned from the office now, and her overtures refused? Her voice was defiant, but her heart shrank. Mr. Durham's voice when he finally replied to her charge was as mild as his words were surprising.

"Mrs. Palliser, do you mind telling me—did your husband know that you were coming here to-day?"

She stared in amazement. "No, indeed!"

"Ah!" He shook his head with the same incomprehensible gentleness. "And when he told you this story, it was with no idea that it was to be repeated to me?"

Her bewilderment grew. Faintly, though rebelliously, she saw the point toward which he was pushing her. "Certainly not. Why should he?"

"My poor Mrs. Palliser! I hate to shiver your illusions; but don't you understand now?"

"No!" she cried.

He leaned toward her with a tenderness that was almost fatherly. "I am not angry. Believe me, I am not angry. I myself have a wife whom I dearly love. And I can understand——" His voice sank again dreamily to the tone of open sentimentality to which the thought of his young wife always moved him.

"Then you mean," said Ellen painfully, "that you expect me to believe that—that my husband made up this tale, in order to spare my feelings?"

"I mean," returned the president kindly, "that I quite understand his motives in what he told you, and that I fully pardon him. And I can only regret that it should be I who am the one to shatter your belief!"

"Shatter my belief!" cried Ellen, while the blood sprang to her pale face in a flood of scarlet. "Then you think you have shattered my belief in my husband? You believe for one moment that you have?"

He regarded her with the same unruffled gentleness, but with a new admiration in his eyes.

"Stick up for him!" he said. "That's the way for a woman to do! Stick up for him through thick and thin!"

For the first time Ellen Palliser realized the impenetrability of the mesh in which her husband was wound. It never even occurred to her to weigh one man's word against the other, or to balance in her mind probability against the evidence presented. It is desire, not facts, that sways a woman's judgment. And Palliser was the man she loved.

She found herself against a dead wall. Against an open enemy she might have fought for her cause. But against this smooth, unruffled gentleness!

"You're making my husband bear the burden of your crimes!" she said. "You're destroying him before all the world! Isn't that enough, without trying to destroy him in the eyes of his wife as well?"

This time she had the satisfaction of seeing the benignant smile wither on the face which

fronted hers. And the eyes regarded her with a long frown of amazement.

"With all charity for the difficulties of your present situation, Mrs. Palliser," said the financier, with cold severity, "I must beg you to remember where you are, and whom you address. My time is very fully occupied. If you have no more pressing business here than to insult me I must beg you to excuse me." And he turned toward his desk in a gesture of dismissal.

Through the mists of her anguished bewilderment, Ellen's brain leaped to its swift conclusion. As her husband had said, they were in this man's power. To fight was useless. To incur his enmity was to defeat the very purpose for which she had come. To temporize was humiliating, revolting; but it was her only chance.

"Mr. Durham," she said, "but I haven't told you yet what I came for." Then, as his offended dignity refused to turn back to her: "Mr. Durham," she said, with eager humility, "I didn't mean to insult you. Will you listen to me for just a moment, please?"

"Well, well," he answered, turning back, pen

in hand. The face he showed her was no longer that of the sympathetic family friend, but of the stern, harassed business man. "Pray be quick, Mrs. Palliser," he said. "I have a very important appointment at this very moment."

"Mr. Durham," she said desperately, "my husband has fifty thousand dollars of stock in this company. I find that I can raise about two hundred thousand more. For that sum, cash down to-morrow, will you give me back the initialed notes and the Achaguas vouchers which form the sole evidence against my husband?"

For a moment his stern face showed almost amazement, almost approval. He nodded abruptly. "So you came to talk business, Mrs. Palliser," he said. "Why have we been wasting our time?"

A flood of hope rushed through her. "Then you will agree?" she cried.

With a creak of his leather-cushioned chair, the portly president rose to his feet. With slow deliberate steps he walked up and down over the soundless rugs.

"A trifle over two hundred and fifty," he said

meditatively. "One half of the sum that your husband—er—one half of the missing amount, Mrs. Palliser!"

Ellen winced, but held her self-possession. Her brown eyes surveyed him eagerly. Every nerve in her body twitched in an agony of suspense.

"Your property, I suppose, Mrs. Palliser. I didn't know you had money—however, that's neither here nor there. Cash to-morrow, you say?"

"Cash to-morrow," she repeated steadily.

"H'm-h'm-m-m," he reflected aloud, while the wrinkles in his rugged face deepened with the intensity of his thoughts. "And five hundred thousand gone! At any other time but this the offer would be an absurd one. But this autumn, with credit overstrained and breaking all over the city, our great object must be to preserve our own credit intact. A public scandal, a trial, and all that—I don't deny, the damage might be as great for the Patroons as for our poor friend the cashier." He paused in his walk. "Two hundred and fifty," he said, "and money's tight.

You see, I am frank with you, Mrs. Palliser. Money is tight! And with judicious management the hole might be filled and covered. Yes, there's a chance. I'll not deny there's a chance!"

Ellen clasped her hands. At these first words of hope, she realized how black and sickening had been the load of fear which for two days she had been carrying. With a rapidity that was almost ludicrous, her indignation melted to the very ecstasy of gratitude.

"Mr. Durham! You accept? You accept?"

The wrinkles on his bald forehead showed the thought that weighed its calculations beneath.

"It's a point, Mrs. Palliser, on which I must reflect. And yet——"

"And yet, Mr. Durham, you're the one to decide, aren't you? No one else knows anything about it—does he?"

"I am the only person in this establishment," he returned, with kindly severity, "so far, who knows of poor Palliser's—mistake!"

This time, in the thrilling excitement of her hope, she forgot to wince at his innuendo. "You accept, Mr. Durham—you accept?"

For two minutes there was silence, while the financier's busy pencil made its calculations. Again the telephone tinkled. This time its intrusive summons passed unheeded. Ellen twisted her hands together in her lap and waited.

"You accept, Mr. Durham—you accept?"

He mused aloud, as though not hearing her. "To represent Henderson, through an agent, as offering to redeem his notes for one-half their face value—it might be done. Even if I assume the responsibility, I shall be the only man in New York to pull anything out of the Achaguas wreck. And a quarter of a million, after all, is a very different matter from nothing at all. And with these hard times, and money at its present high figure, who can say but this timely sum might save the institution itself? Yes, Mrs. Palliser, I think—I think that——"

"What?" cried Ellen, in a great gulp of joy.

"I think, Mrs. Palliser, that we may be able —that we may be able to pull it through."

"Then I'll go and telephone," returned Ellen, with a swift grip of her faculties, "and to-morrow I'll bring you the money."

She leaped to her feet, as though action could not keep swift enough pace with her wish. Then, remembering with whom she was dealing, she turned in a sudden shock of precaution.

"Mr. Durham, pardon me! But as the raising of this money means to me the taking of serious steps—yes, of very serious steps—I would like to be assured. The papers in question constitute the sole existing proof against my husband?"

He nodded. She went on swiftly.

"There's no danger from the certificates of stock themselves? From any stray correspondence, or anything like that?"

"Mrs. Palliser," returned the president patiently, "as the certificates are worthless as investment and dangerous as evidence, they are probably—pardon me—destroyed. As for correspondence, there could have been none except with Henderson, the defaulting promoter of the Achaguas. And as Henderson is either dead or a fugitive, he need not be taken greatly into account. Yes, I may say that with the notes and vouchers in your own hands, Mrs. Palliser,

you may feel that you have saved your husband from the consequences of his—ahem!"

In the intensity of her thought, Ellen allowed this last slur to pass high over her head. "Mr. Durham, it's not that I have any doubts, of course," she said, with sudden caution, "but, as I say, this money can be raised only by the taking of very decided steps. And as the whole business is, as you can imagine, one of life and death for me—I wonder if I might be allowed, as a kind of guarantee, to see with my own eyes what——"

She fixed him with her eyes as she spoke. In spite of her fierce efforts at self-control, doubt was in them. The banker's first impulse was evidently a dignified scorn. Then he smiled grimly.

"You mean, Mrs. Palliser, that before you take further steps you would like me to guarantee the transaction by giving you a sight of the incriminating documents?"

She nodded eagerly. At the door of the room the little electric bell rang sharply. Mr. Durham raised his voice: "One moment!" Then,

turning toward the open safe at his elbow: "I have little time to spare, Mrs. Palliser, as you see—especially in anxious and driven times like these. But I have no objection to showing you the papers in question, before you go—receipts for moneys paid over by James M. Palliser to the Achaguas Rubber Company of New York and Rio. Signed by B. K. Henderson. On pale-blue paper, as I remember—h'm—h'm! Then the notes signed by Henderson and initialed by J. M. P. H'm! They were docketed here under P, as I remember."

He fumbled among the neatly arranged papers, while Ellen waited in tense impatience for the sight of the ducuments which meant so much to her. There was a moment's pause. Then Mr. Durham turned with the same large dignity. Again the door-bell rang, but this time more sharply.

"I am sorry," he said, "but my secretary has evidently been at work here again, rearranging the order of my files; and as she is very busy up-stairs, I really have no time to call her down, or to go through these papers myself. But I

will have them for you to-morrow. Good afternoon, Mrs. Palliser."

She was dismissed. She had been humiliated at all points, but her object itself was gained. To-morrow, and by her hand, Jim would be freed! As the door was held open for her to pass out, she pulled down her veil over her face again; not so much to avert the possible chance of premature detection by her husband, as to hide from the liveried boy by the doorway her insensate face of delight. For even though the autumn evening had fallen, the electric light made it as light as day.

To-morrow Jim would be a free man! The odor of the violets on her bosom rose to her nostrils like the incense of triumph. And she flung herself into her waiting taximeter like a living whirlwind of joy.

"Back to——" She took in her breath. Down the marble step of the door whence she had just issued, a figure in the green-and-silver livery of the Patroons was hurrying after her; not the young man who an hour before had let her in, but a new figure, boyish and eager. A pink,

snub-nosed face was thrust eagerly in at the door of her cab, and a sudden hand dropped into her lap the unexpected gift of a book. And a boyish voice, thrilling with the delightful importance of mystery, hissed in her ear:

"Say, here's your book that you left. And I ain't piped him a woid—not a woid! And I never will, not if they kill me for it—see?"

With amazing agility the figure skipped back to the steps, and the swinging door closed upon it. The driver turned back to his customer.

"What number, lady?"

Ellen gave him her address. The cab, wheeling in a half-circle, turned back to the thronged Avenue. For the moment, Ellen's eye was riveted on the book in her lap. The startling nature of the incident that had bestowed it upon her took her mind for that instant even from the contemplation of its own startling success. How had this boy, whom to her knowledge she had never seen before, known with such certainty that it was her object to keep her visit to the office a secret from her husband?

She turned the pages of the book in her lap.

By the steady radiance of the Avenue's arc-lights, her idle eye surveyed it. It was an ordinary dollar-and-a-half novel, in ordinary cloth covers lettered with gilt. There was no name on the fly-leaf. Probably it was her husband's property. Or possibly some one had left it in the reception-room where she had recently waited. And the boy, finding it, had not unnaturally concluded it was hers.

She decided to wait until the next day before she returned it. Just now she had affairs of her own on hand, which would admit no delay. What would Jim say, what would he feel, when she put her arms around his neck and told him that he was free?

Her heart leaped and burned within her. "Glad tidings of great joy!" she whispered to herself. "Glad tidings of great joy!"

CHAPTER VII.

Robbed of Her Triumph.

The taximeter darted and swooped its cautious way up the Avenue. Through the open window Ellen smiled out impartially at the hurrying crowds, at the flashing carriage-lamps, at the lighted windows. The bustle, the life, the suggestion of merriment, all found their echo in her soul. Jim was not going to be disgraced, and his name hawked up and down the Avenue by the screaming newsboys. Her husband was free, and it was she who had freed him.

Through the ecstasy of that thought shot suddenly a little womanly impulse. The divine completeness of the coming joy must be lacking not in one detail, however prosaic. She smiled a little delighted smile to herself. Yes, on this, their last evening in their own home, she would give her husband his favorite dinner. To-morrow their household goods would be scattered in

the hands of strangers. But to-night, at least, Jim and she would be merry together, and he should have the simple, old-fashioned food of his particular choice.

What she had ordered for dinner she hardly remembered. However, that did not matter! It was barely six o'clock, and the markets were still open. She gave the new direction to her driver. A moment later, alighting, she chose her porterhouse steak with a frowning solicitude that was given to it not as steak, but as a visible symbol of the success which warmed her heart. At the next stop, a half-dozen bottles of German beer; at the next, an apple pie. Then, as a final touch, a bag of roasted peanuts from a vender on the corner. How ridiculously well she knew his tastes, and how ridiculous his tastes were, after all!

How happy she was! How happy she was! What did poverty matter, the break-up of old associations, the giving up of pretty things long cherished, the sacrifice of comfortable prospects long held as a right—what did anything matter beside the fact that her beloved was safe

from disgrace and shame, and that it was she who had saved him? She, *she,* Ellen Palliser? She rattled the bag of peanuts triumphantly in her hand like a gleeful baby. Her eyes were filled with tears that wet her veil. How deliciously absurd they were, after all, these heroic heights of joy!

Once arrived at her apartment, she was forced to accept the door-boy's aid with her precious bundles. Grudgingly she allowed him to carry the book and the bottles of beer. She herself carried the parcel of steak pressed to her bosom like a child, and the pie guarded delicately in her outstretched hand.

Up-stairs a new joy waited for her, in the guise of a calamity. The cook, who had gone out in the afternoon to look for a new place, had not yet come in. Armandine, who gave the news with a sour grin, announced her own intention of leaving the next day. Ellen's glad-heartedness was, however, proof against these shocks.

"Very well," she cried blithely, "it desolates me to lose you, my girl, but, in any case, we break up housekeeping to-morrow. So, after all,

it's just as well—and to-night I'll cook the dinner myself!"

She threw her bundles on the kitchen-table. Then, with the aid of the supercilious Nikeda, she lit the gas-range and put the sweet potatoes to bake. Steak and sweet potatoes—yes, that was the dinner Jim loved!

It was almost half-past six. At any moment now her husband might come in. After dinner she would write to Belden and to her visitors of the morning. She danced off to her room to change for the evening. With a whimsical thought she called on Armandine, not for one of her more elaborate house-gowns, but for a little summer dress of white piqué. With a little white ruffled apron tied around her waist, and her arms bare to the elbow, she took on quite a professional air. She laughed at herself in the glass.

"Miss Murphy," she said, "ye're no la-a-ady!"

Her radiant eyes and cheeks merged and melted together in one dazzling reflection with the silver toilet things and the candles in their silver sconces. All these dear, foolish fripperies

to which she was used, all this delicate luxury which was her birthright—to-morrow she was to leave it all behind, and go to a cheap boarding-house with a couple of trunks. Again she laughed at her shining image in the glass.

"Ellen," she cried, "you lucky, lucky girl!"

Seven o'clock drew near. Nikeda had set the table. The peanuts were in a dish of antique silver occupying a conspicuous place beside Jim's plate, and the pie was on the sideboard. The beer was cooling. In the kitchen the roasting sweet potatoes had begun to give out their nutty odor. And Ellen, with a sharp knife and a skilful hand, was trimming her steak.

Two minutes before seven! She tried the potatoes. Yes, they were done. One of them had popped with delicious promise. Yes, of course, everything must be ready when Jim came! She put her steak to broil over the clear blue flame, standing beside it with flushed face and triumphant eyes.

The heat scorched her unaccustomed skin; and as she turned her steak she brought her arm too close to the nose of the steaming kettle on the

other hob. The burn flared out like a scarlet brand on the milky surface of her arm, but she was quite unaware of the pain. With her whole soul in the business before her, she broiled her steak.

Five minutes later she turned it into the platter, rare and juicy. And she had just finished the delightful work of buttering and peppering it, when she heard the key click in the lock. Her heart leaped in a throb that was almost unbearable. The moment had come!

The butter-knife dropped with a clatter to the floor as she sprang for the door. Palliser stood before her. She tried to cry her news aloud: "Jim, you're saved! Darling, you're saved!" The words swelled and broke in her throat. As she flung her hot arms about her husband's neck, she was inarticulate for mere excess of joy.

"Jim!" was all she could say, while the tears burst from her eyes. "Oh, Jim!"

"There, there, Nelly!" He patted her shoulder tenderly. "It's all right, darling, don't cry! It's all right! It's all arranged! I'm safe! Do you hear that, darling? I'm safe!"

"What?" she said, lifting her head. "What?"

Joy and relief shone plain in the handsome face bent to hers, to indorse his words. What had happened to rob her of her promised triumph? Had Mr. Durham told?

"What?" she said again, bewildered. "Then you've heard?"

"This afternoon!" he said, while a strong exultation ran and thrilled in his voice. "I'd have come home sooner, but I had a thousand things to see to. Or I'd have telephoned, but I wanted the pleasure of telling you myself, and seeing the joy on your dear little face. Safe, Nelly, do you understand? No more examination, no more indictment, no more standing up in the court-room to face a jury—no more disgrace and dishonor looming over me. God! If you could know the relief, girl! If you could know the relief!"

For the moment his face worked in the intensity of his feeling. His relief, like his despair, was a passion. Ellen, loosing her arms from his neck, stood by while he took off his overcoat. Was it wicked, she asked herself, this shock of

disappointment that trickled over her like a cold wave? She had looked for the triumph which belongs to the messenger of joy, and here she was only its recipient. No, she was not disappointed, she told herself, she was only bewildered. How had Jim heard the news? Had Mr. Durham told? But it was already evening when she had quitted him. Jim spoke of this afternoon. In that case——

"If you could know, Nelly," Jim's exultant voice went on, "what it is to be my own man again! To walk up the avenue without dodging the policemen at the crossings, and to walk into the office without asking myself: 'Have they come for me yet?' To know that I'm out of the grip of that hoary-headed old rascal, Nelly——"

"What?" she cried, in amazement. "Then it wasn't Mr. Durham that told you?"

Jim was silent. His gay looks were clouded. "No—yes," he said hesitatingly; then, in a kind of desperation: "The fact is, Nelly, I'd rather not say."

Ellen stared. Her bewilderment grew to an encroaching helplessness. "What do you mean,

Jim?" she asked slowly. "Why don't you tell me all about it? The fact is, I had some news to tell you myself, only—only it doesn't seem worth while till I hear yours. Tell me all about it, please. You're quite safe, you say? The charge is withdrawn? The evidence is withdrawn? There's no more danger for you, either present or future? You're absolutely safe, Jim?"

He nodded. "As safe as you are yourself, darling."

A little pang of unselfish joy, purified of its momentary disappointment in its own triumph, ran through Ellen's heart. She caught her husband's hand in her own and, stooping, laid her hot cheek against it.

"I'm glad, dear old boy!" she said. "I'm so glad!"

He leaned over and kissed her. She raised her head. "But you haven't told me about it yet!" she cried. "Come, how did it happen? How in the world did you ever manage it?"

Curiosity flamed within her as she waited for her husband's answer. Mr. Durham, an hour or two ago, had certainly known nothing of Jim's

successful move to defeat him. Or was it possible that with a still deeper guile than was yet suspected, he had played her with one hand and Jim with the other? Had he snatched at the chance of gilding his disappointment by extracting from her ignorance such funds as might be possible? Or what was the answer to the riddle?

"Come, Jim!" she cried. "Tell me quick, dear, please!"

A sudden cloud obscured the brightness of Palliser's look. "I'm sorry, dear," he answered slowly, "I can't."

"Can't what?"

"Can't tell you."

"Can't tell me—*me?*"

There was a moment's pause. Palliser made an uneasy gesture. "There's the only drawback to the whole affair, darling. The release is undoubted. But I'm not at liberty to say anything more than that."

"I see."

She drew a long breath. Her pride would allow her to ask no further question. She felt curiously chilled, oddly rebuffed. The golden

joy which with so much labor and sacrifice she had prepared for her husband was, after all, unwanted. The story of the day's striving and hard-won triumph was not even worth the telling, since the story of Jim's success was not to be told to her. She, who had seen herself the savior of her husband's honor and very life, found herself suddenly a mere outsider. She could do nothing for him. She could not even share his joy.

She pulled her lips to a smile. "I see," she said again. "Of course, I won't bother you with any questions. Will you come out to dinner as you are, dear? I'm afraid everything will be spoiled."

Palliser's embarrassment deepened to distress. "I'm so sorry, darling, but I've got to go right off again. I'm to dine up-town and meet the—the parties. The affair is to be finished up to-night. Do you understand?"

"I understand," repeated Ellen mechanically. Suddenly she was conscious of the pain of the burn on her arm. She had no idea, she told herself, that a burn could hurt so much.

Her husband stooped to kiss her. "Dear little girl, it's a beastly shame. I don't know anything that always makes me feel more disgusted than to lose a dinner at home with you. But this time, you see, I've no choice. By Jove, I'll be late, too, if I don't hurry up. Now for my lightning-change act—go and eat your dinner, darling!"

Ten minutes later Jim, in his inverness, was whirled down the elevator to the waiting electric cab. He had promised to be home early, he had kissed his wife the fondest of hurried good-bys, he had left his regret and the evening paper to console her. She sat at the dinner-table with the paper propped up before her, while Nikeda, with much gravity, served the spoiled steak and the overdone potatoes.

Ellen did not eat very much. The head-lines of the newspaper danced before her eyes, and her mouth was very dry.

"I'm selfish to feel this way about it," she said to herself fiercely, as she patted her stinging arm with ice-water, "just when I ought to be

feeling so glad. You're a pig, Ellen Palliser, that's what you are—a pig!"

Her resolution carried her even to the length of accepting a piece of apple pie. But when Nikeda, placing the silver dish of peanuts on his silver waiter, offered them to her with ceremony, she could bear it no longer. That scarlet brand on her arm had smarted its way into her soul. With a hasty gesture of refusal she rose to her feet. A moment later, with doors locked and with hands tight clasped over her burning eyes, she lay silent, face downward upon her bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

The First Secret.

Eleven o'clock struck. Ellen, propped on pillows, was sitting up in bed reading. In practise as well as in theory, she hated the woman who "sat up" for her husband. So, as sleep was impossible, this was her compromise.

She turned the pages furiously, as one frightening away thought. The book itself was of no great interest; being, indeed, the stray volume that had been forced on her acceptance earlier in the day. Its title was "The Greater Purity," and its subject a turgid passionateness which at any other time would hardly have sufficed to keep Ellen's healthy young lids from closing. At this moment, however, she felt as though sleep would never come near her again.

How lonely it was, this evening to which she had looked forward with so much joy! The fierce efforts of the day had overwearied body and soul alike. Her nerves, strained by the

racking anxieties of the past forty-eight hours, were twanging all together. The thought of her recent disappointment lay against her heart like a knife. She longed inexpressibly for her husband's coming, yet feared it, too. For the first time since they had known each other there was the barrier of an admitted secret between them.

With the whole force of her resolution she put doubt from her. Just at this moment, when she should be happier than ever before in her life, to let her joy and Jim's be clouded by a brooding vanity! Vanity, that was all it was, this disappointment that her husband should be saved by another hand than hers, even by his own! He was safe, without the price she had so gladly planned to pay—a sacrifice to be borne, after all, as much by him as by herself. Their home was safe, their little savings, the inheritance which some day would add so much to their security and their ease. The cloud that had threatened so much disaster had passed by, leaving their cheerful and kind existence as it was before.

Was she not a goose, to let its shadow stay? The secret, what did that matter? Did not every

husband keep his business affairs more or less a secret from his wife? A pretty thing, indeed, if an active financier at every turn of the game had to take some woman into his confidence! The method by which Jim had freed himself from the engulfing complication was most distinctly none of her business. He was free, and that knowledge should be enough for her.

She turned the pages feverishly. In spite of her resolution, her restless soul went back to the miserable grinding of its doubts. Of course, the details were none of her business. But, then, why had Jim shared his pain with her, to the last detail? And if his pain, why not his joy?

He had said just now he was not at liberty to tell. That must mean a promise to some one else—to the "parties" with whom he was now spending his evening. Who were they, these "parties" who hid their light under so modest and imperious a bushel?

It might be the "hoary-headed old rascal" himself, playing a double game with the man he had already once victimized. But in that case, would he not have commanded her, on her side, to a

like secrecy? It might be the defaulter Henderson, sneaked back from the dead in order to make tardy restitution to the man who through his fault had been so monstrously threatened. It might be—she clamped down the vise of her will on her spinning brain. After all, if she loved her husband well enough to sacrifice for him all present luxury and all future prospects, might she not be willing to make him a burnt offering of an ignoble trifle like her curiosity?

The paper rattled as her rapid hand turned the trashy leaves. Suddenly she stopped, her eyes staring, her mouth wide open.

The new page which she had turned was the end of a chapter, finishing with a few lines at the top. The half-page thus left blank below was scrawled over and over in a penciled handwriting that she knew.

This time her reading was no forced and weary pretense. The words before her, in her husband's familiar handwriting, riveted her eye.

Vouchers, 5 in all, typewritten on pale-blue paper, stamp of Achaguas Rubber Company. Sums aggregating $65,000, paid by J. M. Palliser to B. K. Henderson.

Notes, 7 in all, sums aggregating $540,000, discounted by Patroons Trust Company, signed by B. K. Henderson, initialed by J. M. P. *12 in all.* Memorandum signed by J. M. Palliser.

Ellen remained staring. Her husband's face, looking out at her suddenly from a jail window, would have startled her less.

The silence about her was broken suddenly by the click of a key in the outer door. Ellen thrust the book with its perplexing scrawl beneath her pillow. Her first impulse was to rush and meet her husband. Then the remembrance of the secret that lay between them smote her to a shy self-consciousness. She would not wear before him the look of a woman scheming to force his confidence. With a quick turn of her fingers she extinguished the electric bulb that dangled by her ear, and cuddled down silently in the dark.

Her husband's steps, slower than their wont, came softly down the corridor.

"Ellen!" said his voice at her door.

She lay silent, breathing quickly. Of course, the book had been left in his office, there at the

Patroons, by some careless lady client—or left in the reception-room, and carried by mistake to his room. In the abstraction of his despair his fingers had traced upon its stray pages the fateful words that were naturally uppermost in his brain.

"Nelly, darling! Are you asleep?" said his voice again.

She stirred herself. "Yes, Jim," she answered slowly. Then she turned on the light, and her wide-awake eyes surveyed him.

At the sight of his dearly loved face, smiling at her from the door, the doubts which assailed her vanished like ugly shadows before the light. She sprang up, with her long white negligée trailing around her, and threw her arms about her husband's neck.

"You're safe?" she cried. "It's all right now? It's all settled?"

He kissed her. "All settled," he answered cheerfully, though with a hint of hesitation in his voice. "That is, all but a few last formalities."

"Not quite settled!" She echoed his tone as well as his words. It was hard, indeed, if this

evening's disappointment, which had dashed hopes so dear to her, had not brought full security as to its recompense!

"The moment it's settled, and the papers in my hands, you shall know it—I give you my word for that, Nelly! But that's a mere technicality —you see, I want to tell you the literal truth, darling. But practically I'm a free man at this moment. Do you congratulate me, darling?"

"With my whole heart!" she cried, in unaffected delight at his words. "Only I can't realize it yet, you see! Sit down, dear, and tell me all about it!"

As he sat beside her a sudden chill of remembrance fell over the enthusiasm of her last words. "But I forgot," she said, drawing a long breath, "you can't tell me about it, can you? I forgot."

Her voice broke, for the day had been a trying one; and the mystery which now lay between them reared itself suddenly to the proportions of an icy wall, cutting her off from the warm human sympathy for which her soul longed. She was not inquisitive, she told herself indignantly. She trusted her husband, and granted him his

right to his secrets. And yet, just at this point where she had suffered so much and hoped so much, to find herself suddenly pushed away as an outsider! The long evening of solitude, falling on top of her glowing enthusiasm, had carried faith and courage suddenly to a dangerous ebb. It was impossible for her to speak, but she smiled at him.

"And what have you been doing all the evening, dear?" asked Jim, with an evident willingness to get away from the forbidden topic.

"Charlotte telephoned me about eight o'clock," she answered indifferently, "to ask me to go to the play with her and some people she has visiting her from Washington. But I felt too tired; so I just went to bed and read all the evening." A sudden irresistible impulse seized her. She raised her eyes, steadily and clearly. "I've been reading a book called 'The Greater Purity,'" she said. "Did you ever hear of it, Jim?"

Her eyes were on his, but his unstartled face showed neither embarrassment nor bravado. His voice expressed nothing but his indifference.

"No," he said, "I'm not much on novels, you know, dear!"

She took in her breath. Her hands, fumbling about the edges of the mystery that baffled her, fell back ineffectual and abashed. Her impulse to produce the book was quenched. Since her husband did not recognize even its title, where was the use in showing it to him? And why, after all, should he have noticed the title of the flimsy volume at the moment when his unconscious fingers had traced his troubled thought on its vacant leaf?

The blood rushed to her face in sudden shame at her own self-trickery. Where was the use of pretending, either to herself or to him, that she could bear this silence on the point most thrillingly vital between them? Whether she was moved by curiosity or by the nobler desire to share every thought of the man she so deeply loved, was a point not worth disputing. By whatever impulse she was pushed, she found this barrier of silence more than she could bear.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, in a grieved voice.

"If you knew what I had been doing to-day myself, I think you wouldn't shut me out like this!"

He glanced in open surprise. "What have you been doing, Nelly?"

In words as brief and rapid as possible she related to him the day's transactions; the visit of the Jews in the morning, Belden's message of the afternoon, and her own interview with Durham. The specially cooked and uneaten dinner was the only point suppressed. Her voice choked a little as she concluded her tale with the promise obtained from the president of the Patroons; this story, which was to be that of her triumph, was now related as it were only by way of apology.

"What a trump you are, Nelly!" cried her husband. What spontaneous enthusiasm was lacking from his voice? He expanded, as it were, in words which should fill the gap of confidence made by his own silence. "What a trump you are—what a thoroughbred! You're the girl to stick by a man when he's in trouble! Planning to sell all your little precious knick-knacks, and to bargain away all your future inheritance into the bargain! But isn't it a wonderful thought

that you don't have to do it? The house, the inheritance, the job itself, all safe—and your beggar of a husband, the safest of the lot. Your noble sacrifice wasn't needed, after all—isn't that magnificent, Nelly?"

"Yes," she answered mechanically; while the barrier which she already had felt between her and her love, seemed to freeze and thicken into that tangible wall of ice. She flung out her bare arms in a desperate gesture, as though to melt that growing barrier before it should be too late. Her hands, clutching her husband's shoulders, reminded her of that desperate grasp in which two nights before she had seized him; then, as it seemed, from the encroaching clutch of death, now from that of an enemy more shadowy but more fatal still.

"Dear Jim!" she cried. "Don't think me inquisitive, don't think that I speak from no motive but mere frivolous curiosity! But don't you understand? I've lived this thing with you! Your peril was my peril—I felt the policeman's clutch on my own shoulder, Jim! I've fought for you to-day as I'd never have had the cour-

age to fight for myself—when it's for you, I'm afraid of nothing! You needn't thank me, it would have been no sacrifice if I'd stripped myself of everything but these rags I stand in. It was done for you, so it was my joy—my joy that I hoped to share with you. Dear heart, won't you share yours with me?"

She bent toward him. Her smile was an all-embracing caress. Palliser turned troubled eyes upon her.

"But I have shared it with you. Dear, I'm a free man. No danger threatens me. Isn't that enough?"

"Enough," she answered, in a low tone, "if I'm not to know any more."

"Bluebeard's closet!" said her husband, shaking his finger at her, with a smile.

But the playfulness was a self-confessed failure. They remained staring at each other with an expression in the eyes of each which had never been there before. Ellen's pride bade her be silent. Her love prompted one final effort. Her wearied nerves lent her an almost hysterical energy.

"Bluebeard's wife peeped because she doubted. I only want to share because I love. Dear Jim, this is the first secret that ever has been between us—and to-night, of all the nights that ever were, I feel it between us—it frightens me. Something sad will come of this silence—something dreadful will come of it. I feel it! I know it! Dearest, just one little word!"

Her husband's embarrassment, deep and obvious, showed almost to irritation in his voice as he replied:

"My dear girl, it's a matter of honor, and that's all there is about it. Don't you understand?"

"Ah!" When a man talks of his honor a woman feels her nose brought up suddenly hard against a wall. It seemed to Ellen that the shock had taken her breath from her. It was in a whisper that she asked:

"Just one thing, Jim. Is it anything that it would hurt me to know?"

He hesitated in a plain uncertainty. Then he answered very precisely, like a man weighing his words:

"I'm quite sure, my dear child, that it's nothing that ought to hurt you to know!"

"But, ah!" cried Ellen sorrowfully, "I didn't ask if it ought to hurt me, I asked if it *would* hurt me!"

This time the silence seemed acute and heavy with menacing possibilities. To his wife's last words Palliser attempted no direct reply.

"Ellen," he said, with sudden energy, "don't you trust me?"

She lifted her chin in a sudden realization of her own dignity.

"Yes," she said, "I trust you, Jim!"

This was the first time that she had ever had to protest her faith in him. It seemed to her that this necessity of open expression marked an epoch in their relations with each other.

CHAPTER IX.

Ellen Begins to Understand.

The next day broke with a curious blackness for Ellen. The absorbing purpose for which the past two days she had striven existed no longer. She had nothing to do but to telephone the Hebrew dealers that her belongings were, after all, not for sale, and to telephone Belden that the money was not wanted. The King of France, who had marched up the hill with the high glory of a martyr, was marching down again a sleek and bloodless victor. The only task that remained for the triumphant martyr to face was to soothe the damaged feelings of her maid and butler, and to seek a new cook.

To this bewildering anticlimax was added, however, another task decidedly more heroic; namely, to hold her tongue.

Ellen's dignity, to say nothing of her tact, forbade another mention of the subject which lay

like a burning weight on her heart. That it was equally present in her husband's mind was plain from the air of constraint with which he greeted her at the breakfast-table. And skirting the subject that lay between them, he passed on to remark on the sensational news that stared up at him from the paper.

"These copper failures are a frightful thing, Nelly," he observed, with hurried gravity; "there was nothing else talked of yesterday. This high-flying Western firm, now, banked with the Broad Street National, which is one of the Patroons chain. Their failure is going to hit us where we live. And with call-money running up to ten per cent. a month, and stocks fluttering like a scared horse, there's no saying where the next few days will land us. This city is in a bad way, Nelly; and, between friends, I don't mind owning that the Patroons is one of the weakest spots in the lot. When the smash comes, Nelly, if smash it must, I own that I haven't much hope for us."

"Indeed, I hope it won't," she returned, with polite concern. "That would be dreadful." Then

she added, with determined and energetic affection: "But what does that matter, dear Jim, so long as we know that you are safe?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid it will be all of us, from president to depositors, Nelly, instead of the one particular burnt offering that was prepared. However, this is the kind of thing that one's prepared to fight. What do I care what comes in the way of honorable failure, so long as I can walk down the Avenue without crossing when I see a policeman?"

The fine edge of their common joy was dulled by the film of the first confessed secret that had ever been between them. Ellen felt this disenchantment in herself, and raged that she could not conceal it; and more painful yet, she felt its shadow in her husband's smile and in his good-by kiss. For the first time they parted with something resembling relief. With a heart weighed down by a vague heaviness, Ellen turned to her morning round of housekeeping and of shopping.

At one o'clock, with Armandine's help, she was putting the finishing-touches on her toilet for the luncheon-party to which she was bound. To find

herself back again in the elegant and trifling routine of her usual existence filled her with a kind of amazement, like a sinking sailor caught miraculously to the solid earth. She sighed—had the ground only been more solid! Had she only been permitted to see with her own eyes the foundations on which her new security rested! And she slipped her rings on her fingers with a sensation of receiving them as a gift from a hand which she was not permitted to see. All her life she had abhorred mystery and concealments; and here a mystery had come to domicile itself in the very heart of her life. In sudden foreboding, she shrank from the days to come.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come!"

Nikeda entered.

"Boy to speak with you, madam."

"A boy! A messenger-boy?"

"No, madam. In livery, but not the A. D. T."

Ellen frowned. "Somebody's page, I suppose. And I haven't but a moment. Tell him to wait in the hall."

A moment later Ellen, issuing from her room,

found herself face to face with the lad in the Patroons livery whose rosy face last evening had for a moment flashed up at her from beneath the electric light.

He ducked a salute. "You've come for your book, I suppose?" asked Ellen quickly.

He heaved a great sigh of relief. "Then you've got it, after all? 'Twas you I passed it in to? Gee! Ain't I lucky Willy, to find it again!"

"Wait a moment," said Ellen.

She turned, and, reentering her bedroom, she took the book from the drawer where she had laid it. The remembrance of those unexplained words, penciled therein in her husband's handwriting, smote her with sudden questionings. Suppose she held here in her hand the key to the mystery which had nipped her joy—what then?

"Here is your book," she said to the boy.

He snatched it eagerly. "T'anks, Mrs. Palliser. You *are* Mrs. Palliser, ain't you? Gee! Wasn't I the farmer, to get you mixed up with her? But I don't care, how was I to tell the diff'rence, wit' the brown veil and the yellow hair a-shinin' through, and the vi'lets?"

"The violets?" said Ellen sharply.

She put out her hand and caught the back of a carved settle, to keep herself from falling. An idea had hit her, falling squarely on her brain as a poleax descends on the head of the fated ox. "The violets?" she said again.

The boy nodded as he eyed his recovered prize with triumph. "How was I to tell the diff'-rence?" he repeated, with an air of injury. "So when she phoned me this mornin' for it, I felt pretty sick, I can tell you. 'Greeny!' I says to myself. So I moseys about a bit and I finds out from the young feller 'twas holdin' down my job yesterday afternoon that 'twas you, Mrs. Palliser. So when my lunch-hour comes, me for the Fletcher fast and the quick sprint up here, see? And I've got it. Say, Mrs. Palliser, can I have a bit of paper to wrop it in, so the boss can't see the name a-glitterin' when I rush it in?"

Ellen was breathing with difficulty. She opened the door of her dining-room. A glance showed her that the room was empty. She called the boy in and shut the door. He eyed her with the sharp, wary glance of the city lad who re-

fuses to be caught unawares in a mystery. With a sudden thought of kindness that struck even through the blind confusion of her rising fears, Ellen remembered that the lad before her was fasting. She rang the bell, and ordered Nikeda to bring the uneaten remainder of the unfortunate apple pie. The boy's eyes glistened as he flung himself on the flaky semicircle. It seemed to him that he had blundered into heaven.

Fighting off still further the enlightenment which, like an approaching flood, Ellen seemed to hear roaring every moment nearer, she sent the Japanese for the required wrapping-paper. The hands of the clock were creeping on toward the hour of her appointment; but she sat motionless in her velvet and plumes, with her gloved hand clenched in her lap.

When the door was shut upon the butler she raised her eyes again to the blissfully gobbling boy before her.

"Why are you afraid of the boss seeing the book when you rush it into the bank?" she asked, with indifference.

He stared at her. "Why? Cos I promised, of

course, that I'd never pipe to him, and I won't! And to let him have a look at this—what'd that be but pipin'?"

"Ah!" Ellen took her breath again. It seemed to her that the security on which for a moment she had stood was riven suddenly. Her eyes drew back from the chasm half-seen beneath. Her better judgment cried to her to halt, but her instinct drew her relentlessly to the dangerous edge. And her instinct gave her art.

"You're talking nonsense, my boy," she said. "How could anybody come to the bank and the boss not see her?"

"Out to lunch," he said, with his mouth full of pie.

"Perhaps *he* might be," she cried, with contempt, "but all the other people down at the bank —where were they? You're giving yourself too much importance, my child, when you imagine that you are the only one to hold the secret of this visit."

He fell into her trap. "Say, Mrs. Palliser," he said indignantly, "wot do you t'ink I am—and what do you t'ink de bank is, anyway? W'en

one o'clock strikes, de whole bunch rushes demselves over to the chop-house, see? All but Mr. Miller in his room. And de corridor it might be choich on a week-day, see? All but me and the door-boy, and yesterday the door-boy had gone up-stairs wit' the nose-bleed—see?"

Furiously Ellen pursued her ruse. "I don't believe a word you say, my boy. To go off and leave a row of offices unguarded but for a couple of children—ridiculous!"

"Children!" he cried, sputtering over his pie. "Children nuttin'! There's the watchman at the door and the vault watchman, and the cops outside, ain't there? And, anyway, what's the diff, when the safe is all screwed up tight—and the offices, too, all but de boss' sometimes, see? But then, *I'm* there!"

"Have some more pie," said Ellen, helping him lavishly, "and let me fill your glass up with milk again. Here's the sugar." She felt herself Delilah, taking advantage of innocent and greedy boyhood; but for the life of her she could not refrain. "So it was yesterday when the bank was deserted," she said slowly, "and all the offices

locked but the president's, that Mrs. Durham was there?"

A huge crumby morsel of pie halted half-way between plate and open mouth. "Mrs. Doy'm!" cried the boy, in a scared whisper. "But I ain't piped! I ain't piped a word!"

"So it *was* Mrs. Durham," returned Ellen slowly. She was very white.

"It's no fairs," protested the boy, in a tone of injury. "When I took her X, I crossed my heart I'd never give her away. And now, if she hears, she'll know it wasn't de watchman—and she'll git de old man to give me the bounce. Say, I don't know how you got it out of me, but you ain't goin' to pipe on me, now, are you? And you won't pipe on her to the old man?"

"Don't be afraid," said Ellen, rising to her feet. She repeated his words mechanically. "I won't pipe. And now, if you are done your pie, here—you may take these peanuts, too, if you like."

The boy grinned as she emptied the rattling nuts into his pocket. To her they symbolized a tragedy, to him so much "in." He wished that

books would get mixed up every day between the wife of the president and the wife of the cashier, and that he might have the privilege of returning them.

As they went down in the elevator together he noticed the queer white look on the lady's face. He took it to mean she must be hungry for her lunch. So, munching his peanuts as he marched, he set out down the Avenue for the office again.

Ellen, seating herself in the waiting taximeter, gave the address to the driver. She had to speak two or three times, for her voice came hard, and her thoughts were not fully under her own control. She had the sensation of falling through space.

"I must pull myself together before I arrive at the luncheon," she repeated to herself over and over, in a little whisper barely audible over the whirring mechanism. "I must pull myself together before I arrive at the luncheon."

Her brain, coming back slowly to her own control, strained itself to an odd exaltation. The keen autumn air whipped her face. The windowed walls on each side of the Avenue streamed

by her like a cinematograph. Never, it seemed to her, had her mental forces worked with such keenness, with such precision. One by one out of the rushing events of the past two days, trifles once light as air detached themselves and came back to her with a deadly confirmation. Like the gruesome toy of the medieval clockmaker, the stray bones leaped up from the heap and confronted her in one complete and hideous skeleton of proof.

Her husband's words of a few nights before were in her ears: "I'll leave no stone unturned, no wire unpulled, to beat Durham's little game. Fair means or foul, I'll do him before he does me." And what had she answered? She remembered. "Fight fire with fire!"

He had obeyed her. And her advice, recoiling, had seared the one that gave it. Beneath her long glove her scalded arm stung with more than a symbolical pain. Jim had taken her advice, and had fought his fire with fire.

The missing papers which Mr. Durham, in wily self-control, had yesterday claimed to be merely mislaid by his secretary—she knew now,

as well as he had known then, that they had vanished from his safe.

What had he said after dinner the other night? "I always trust my wife to memorize the combination of my safe, and other secrets that can't be trusted to paper." What had he said yesterday afternoon? "My wife never comes here to the office any more."

And yet she had been there herself only a few hours before. Why, at the price of bribery and corruption, had she kept that visit of hers a secret from her husband? What terrified haste had urged her, that she had even left her betraying book behind?

In mathematical precision, like a lawyer preparing his brief, Ellen marshaled the facts. Yesterday, during her husband's absence, Mrs. Durham had paid a swift visit to his office. She had worn a heavy veil, and had bribed office-boy and watchman to insure secrecy. She possessed the combination of the safe. And in her book she carried the description, in Jim Palliser's own handwriting, of the missing documents.

So it was not in his office, in a fit of tortured abstraction, that Jim had penciled that accurate description of the papers upon which hung his fate. She understood now with what motive those careful details had been outlined. But upon what occasion? Again from the limbo in which they had dropped since birth, more facts jumped up like ugly gnomes and thrust their grinning faces against her soul.

"But didn't I see you just now at the Waldorf, with your husband?" Charlotte had said to her at Sherry's only day before yesterday. And she remembered the embarrassment, the quick explanation with which, on her denial, her friend had disclaimed her own mistake. A mistake? Yes, a mistake. But if the slight and detested physical resemblance between herself and the other woman could deceive the office-boy at the Patroons, then why not deceive Charlotte Swanwick? If their solitary figures, veiled and violeted, could be confounded, then why not the passing glimpse of blond hair and tall stature, rushing by in a crowd? In the case of Charlotte, moreover, there had been an antecedent

possibility that the tall blonde in Jim Palliser's company might naturally be his wife. But it was not—*that* time.

Ellen knew now on what occasion her husband had written the description of the documents in Violet Durham's book. And with a little sick throb of remembrance she recalled his unconscious eyes of last night, as she had flung the book's title at him. No, he had not recognized it. Why? Because his attention, when the book was thrust under his eyes, had been so completely absorbed by other things. Where had his eyes been at that moment? She knew.

And she knew also where her husband had dined last night, when he had turned his back on her little feast and on her unwanted sacrifice. He had had no use for the humble means of safety that she had so painfully prepared for him. He had left her, to take his full and assured salvation at the hands of the other woman; the other woman who at such grave and terrible risks had pilfered from her own husband the documents which should save Ellen Palliser's. Under what circumstances, urged by what mo-

tives, does a woman do such a service for a man?

The taximeter came to a full stop beside the curb. Ellen drew a long, hard breath. The world was to be met again, and with a smiling face.

CHAPTER X.

Tearing at the Wall of Mystery.

How the rest of the day passed, and how the sleepless night, Ellen was hardly conscious. She went to bed, but she could not lie down. It seemed to her there was a spur in her bed. She sat bolt upright till the daylight, with her chin resting on her drawn-up knees. From head to foot she was racked with the sick and ungovernable pangs of the woman who sees the bright eyes of another woman between herself and the man she loves.

Had Ellen loved her husband with the cool and Platonic affection which American wives are celebrated for giving their husbands, she might have felt little as a result of her yesterday's discovery. A reasonable vexation, perhaps, that she had been kept in the dark—a slight mortification, perhaps, that the other woman's services had been deemed more valuable than hers. In

point of fact, they were; with no sacrifice of present comfort or of future prospects, Palliser was free. For that freedom, should not his wife be the first to give thanks? Had she felt less for him, she might have done so. But Ellen's feeling for her husband was more than an affection. It was a passion—the one passion that had ever come into her life.

She cared for him, horribly. In her strong and well-balanced nature, here was the weak and undefended spot. Till the day when she had met Jim Palliser she had scorned the romantic follies of other girls. Since the first hour that they had talked together, his idea had lived in her mind more intensely than the consciousness of her own identity. For her, they were the same. Her husband was more herself than the spirit that lived in her own flesh. So vivid was this conviction she had hardly realized her own feeling as the human passion of love, with its infinite possibilities of suffering and of self-torture. The shadow of another woman flitting in the background of her husband's life had suddenly enlightened her.

Had Jim Palliser, setting her aside, taken his salvation from the hands of any other woman whatever, the slight would have been painful enough. But in this case, the woman preferred was the woman he had once loved; the woman that he had loved first. Was she also the woman he had loved best? When his need came, it was to her he turned. Was not such faith the highest proof of love?

And that love once granted, what was its nature? The mere kindly remembrance of a bygone passion, or passion's imperishable self? And if no more than the former, why had the whole transaction been held a secret from her—from her, Jim's wife?

There was the rock on which her faith split. A sentence from Violet's love-letter rang through her excited fancy: "Mum's the word between you and me—isn't it? Isn't it?" Beyond a doubt, mum had been the word, indeed. It was still the word. The ancient lovers still had their meetings and their secrets; and she, Jim's wife, who loved him, was shut out into the cold.

There was the thought that she carried with

her to the breakfast-table. With a resolute imitation of a smile, she sat opposite the anxious financier, as he studied the newspaper and prophesied calamity, if not for himself, at least for the institution which he served. If he noticed her pale looks, it was to attribute them to the recent anxiety. As he bent over her to kiss her good-by, she bit her tongue to hold back her unspoken question: "Jim, what is there between you and Violet Durham?"

A sure intuition, stronger than instinct, held her silent. If a woman sees a thief make off with her diamonds, an open outcry may result in the recovering of her property. But a woman who watches the thievery of something dearer yet knows that to open her mouth in jealous protest is to make her loss not only certain, but irreparable.

"Good-by, dear Jim. Good luck!" said Ellen, and was silent.

Her little housekeeping tasks attended to, she wandered miserably about the apartment. The words of her own impassioned plea of two nights before came back to her mind. "Dear Jim, the

first secret that has ever been between us! Something dreadful will come of it—it frightens me!" If it had frightened her then, it terrified her now with the black panic of a child waking alone in the night. All about her was darkness. What that darkness concealed she knew not.

Faintly within her, more faintly but still audibly, the rational part of her pleaded on the side of peace. "If you respect your husband," argued logic and common sense, "then you know that beneath the most equivocal situation there can be nothing to distress you. If, on the other hand, you know that this reason for distress really exists, then it is plain that Jim is not a man to be respected or valued at all. Hence, why wring your soul in this anguish for him?"

But this special pleading, however logical and ingenious, was knocked out of court by the mere blind pain of the doubt itself. And shriller and more convincing yet rose the voice of the devil's advocate, marshaling the facts which proved Jim Palliser a traitor; and hence, by the cruelly paradoxical law that governs these things, not to be scorned and forgotten by the woman he had

betrayed, but to be the more intensely and rackingly desired.

That, by a sacrifice even more poignant and daring than that which she herself had proposed, this other woman had won Jim's safety added not only a pang to Ellen's sorrow, but another factor to the weight of cumulative proof. Heroic as was the stroke by which she herself had proposed to save him, Violet's heroism had been greater still. In a cruelly grudging pang she owned as much; and her heart contracted painfully as she realized that, dear as her husband had previously been to her, he had risen immeasurably, hideously, by this revelation of the value which another woman set upon him.

She herself had stood ready for his sake to part with the last shred of her worldly possessions; but Violet Durham had been ready to risk her name and position as well. For a woman to go to her husband's office in broad daylight, and sheltered only by the word of an office-boy and a venal watchman, to rob her husband's safe of the papers which he prized—here was a daring stroke which in any other cause might have

moved Ellen's admiration. As it was, the desperate devotion which it argued could move nothing but her horror. Urged by what motive, with hope of what reward, does a woman face ruin so complete as discovery must entail upon Violet Durham? And the man who accepts so immense and heroic a sacrifice, does he accept it with no return, or——

At this point thought ceased. Passion rose and grew dominant. Her eye fell on her toilet-table, on the little red-labeled bottle which still showed its sinister letters behind the glittering crystal. She gazed at it, fascinated. If what she feared was true, then why should she live? Her life had been in the love of her husband. If he had ceased to love her, then why should she continue to live?

With a fierce assertion of its healthy young life, her whole nature reacted against this morbid impulse. She fled from the room in a kind of panic. But the question followed her: If what she feared was true?

Sudden impulse urged her to the telephone; to

call up her husband this instant, to tell him what she knew, and demand the truth.

She clenched her hands. "I won't ask him," she said; "I won't, I won't! Good heavens, I hope I'm still sane enough to know that if I don't want to lose him once and for all, *he's* the last person in the world for me to ask!"

She stopped short. An idea had come to her, suggested by her own words. Jim was the last person in the world of whom she might advantageously demand the explanation which might end her torment. But there was one other person in the world who knew the truth.

Ellen drew in her breath, then exhaled it in a long sigh which seemed for an instant to release the galling stricture of silence in which her soul was bound. With her own hands to tear down this wall of mystery and of silence; without risking a scene of jealous violence between herself and her husband, to have the truth as it stood between them. To go to Violet Durham and face to face, quite candidly and calmly, to ask an explanation of the curious facts disclosed in the last few days.

No, it was impossible—impossible!

Ellen, ringing for Armandine, began a careful toilet for the street. Her mouth was dry, and her head pounded as she remembered it to have done once before at a school-exhibition, when she was a little girl. For one whose sole intention was a brisk constitutional in the Park, this mounting excitement was strangely out of place.

For, her idea of going with an acknowledgment of her distress to the very woman who had caused it—it was absurd. In the first place, such a step would be an unbearable humiliation, and Ellen was proud. In the second, it would be flamboyantly theatrical, and she loved the quiet conventions and restrains of the society to which she belonged. To expose her doubts of her own husband to this woman who was really a stranger to her, to ask as a gift from the woman she despised the treasure that was hers by right—Ellen's face burned suddenly scarlet at the thought, so that Armandine stared in curiosity at the flushed reflection in the mirror before her.

No, she would not go to that woman! The

idea was impossible, unthinkable! The vision came back to her of Violet as she had herself beheld her at her own dinner-table, fair and sumptuous, with the half-veiled insolence of the successful beauty in her hard blue eyes. To display her suffering to the glance of those eyes seemed impossible. It *was* impossible, Ellen repeated with energy. Yet all the time that she so fiercely reiterated to herself the utter impossibility of such a step, she found herself drawn, irresistibly and fatally drawn, toward the very interview that she disowned. The thing that cast the deciding weight in the scale of her indecision was the sight of her own little brass bed, as she turned toward the door.

The memory of last night came back over her with a rush that caught her breath. No, she must sleep to-night—if not the sleep of joyous relief, then the sleep of despair. This torturing indecision, which beat her spirit to and fro like a tormented shuttlecock, was no longer to be borne. The interview with Violet Durham would be painful enough; its result might be more painful yet. Of that Ellen had to take her risk. In

all this horror of uncertainty, one thing only was sure. She knew now that this rack of unverified suspicion happened to be the one particular kind of suffering that she could not bear.

Her resolution was taken.

CHAPTER XI.

Violet Durham's Defiance.

"Mrs. Durham wishes me to tell you, madam, that she is just 'aving 'er electric massage. But if you wish to wait, she will be 'appy to see you in about fifteen minutes."

Ellen nodded. "Please tell Mrs. Durham that I will wait."

With noiseless footsteps the butler withdrew, and she was left alone.

Now that Ellen was on the very verge of the interview which for her must mean so much, the horror which had confused her senses had disappeared. Her temples no longer throbbed, her hands no longer trembled. All her faculties seemed strangely exalted, like one who is scaling a precipice notes not only each jut and fissure of his airy foothold, but the color and shape of every lichen and every stain.

Her eyes, roving about the room, took in each detail of the luxury with which the middle-aged

banker had surrounded his young wife. The rugs, the pictures, the embroidered window-hangings with the view of the Park's yellowing leaves between—all were beyond criticism as they were beyond the envy of the more moderately placed. In situation as in furnishings, the house was the finest that New York could supply.

Ellen's mind was divided between two amazements: first, that the master of so much splendor should have descended to so beggarly a trick as that which Mr. Durham had proposed; secondly and more painful yet, a horrified realization of what must be felt by the woman who for Jim's sake had been ready to risk her position as mistress of so regal a house.

With every nerve still strained to its utmost tension, her brain rehearsed the coming scene. In the extraordinary nature of the feelings which possessed her she had lost all comprehension of the extraordinary interview which she proposed. To question this woman, whom she barely knew, on the hidden secret of her life, and, in return, to display her own most sacredly guarded feelings, seemed now to Ellen a step not only inevitable

but perfectly natural. The theatrical quality of the whole affair, from which at first she had shrunk, seemed now totally lost and merged in a kind of desperate sanity. She was doing what she was doing, not because she wanted to, or even because she judged it best, but because it was the only thing for her to do.

Her eye, roving again over the subdued elegance of the room, was caught by the glimpse of something familiar. There, from the shelf of a corner cabinet, the light was given back from gilt letters that she had seen before:

"The Greater Purity."

Her heart seemed to stand still. Was this a mere coincidence? Could her reason doubt that here before her was the very book of the morning's adventure, clinching its own proofs? Though he had been guilty of one piece of carelessness, it was evident that in the end the pink-faced office-boy had fulfilled his trust.

There was a faint rustle on the stair, soft with the swish of silk. Then a gust of perfume, and Violet Durham entered the room with hand sweetly outstretched.

"My dear Mrs. Palliser! How very charming! Won't you sit down again, please? And will you have some tea?"

Ellen murmured some polite banality in reply as she sank back into her chair. The woman before her, in all her opulence of polished skin and of shimmering silk, seemed less an actual personality than the visible projection of her own violent thought. She needed a moment to adjust herself to the fact that Mrs. William Durham existed not only as a baleful influence remote and fatal like that of an unlucky star, but who, as a human individuality with manicured hands and marcelled hair, had a will and a tongue of her own.

But the purpose which had brought Ellen to this house was too immense and too vital to be long set aside by the barriers of conventionality with which she found herself faced. Her desperate need whipped her flagging resolution. Her imagination, strained and exalted, looked past her hostess' jerky talk and busy teacups into the wide-open, beautiful blue eyes from which her wary soul gazed out. Despite her de-

termined ease of manner, the eyes with which Mrs. Durham regarded her visitor were the eyes of a woman who stands on guard; and over the scarlet surface of her under lip her white teeth preyed ceaselessly. To Ellen's excited fancy, it seemed that before she had framed the words, her own glance had asked her desperate question and met with the clash of a cold rebuff.

"Mrs. Durham!" she said suddenly.

Her hostess stopped short in a careful discussion of the merits of a new soprano. This time openly and without disguise the message flashed from brown eyes to blue. Ellen wet her lips. The words said themselves.

"I want to speak to you, Mrs. Durham, about my husband," she said.

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the click of the hostess' cup as she set it down upon the table. When her reply came it was a surprise to Ellen.

"That will be very nice, Mrs. Palliser," Violet answered sweetly. "You know, your husband and I used to be *such* friends in the old days before I married!"

Ellen stared, bewildered.

"Mrs. Durham," she said, "what's the use of pretenses between you and me? You have done a kind action. That is, if you do not hesitate to acknowledge it, I shall know that it was as kindly meant as it was kindly done. You took the incriminating papers from Mr. Durham and gave them back to my husband—didn't you?"

Desperately her bright eyes searched the cold face before her. Concealment was what she dreaded. Concealment was that blank wall behind which lurked the deadly phantasms which poisoned her peace. One word of frank acknowledgment, if not from the man concerned, then from the woman herself, and Ellen would be only too glad to believe the whole transaction one of mere generous friendship. She sat leaning forward, with clenched hands and with imploring eyes, waiting for the word that did not come.

"Papers?" repeated Violet, with a kind of violent calmness, though a faint flicker of her nostril made more doubtful the calm within. "No, I haven't seen any incriminating papers,

Mrs. Palliser, I assure you. And I haven't seen your husband, either—since your very charming dinner the other night!"

Her eyes, stony and smiling, met those of her guest. Ellen sickened suddenly. It was evident that the hope of a friendly service, to be frankly owned by the woman who had rendered it, was as hollow as her reason had declared it to be.

She hesitated a moment. Conventional politeness had failed. Her weapon now must be the naked truth. She rose to her feet and crossed the room slowly to where the gilt letters of the familiar title glittered in the shadowy corner. Violet followed her with wary eyes. She did not even start when Ellen, fingering the leaves rapidly, turned to the betraying page where Jim's familiar handwriting stared up at her in damning detail.

"Look, Mrs. Durham," she said quietly.

This time a slight flush stole up under the smooth white face that bent itself for an instant over the book that Ellen extended. The reply, however, was spoken with the utmost self-possession.

"Dear me, it's Mr. Palliser's handwriting, isn't it? 'Vouchers, five in all.'" Violet knit her brows over the script. "'Pale-blue paper, stamp of Achaguas Rubber Company.' Dear me! It's a business memorandum, isn't it?"

Ellen drew in her breath hard. "This is your book, isn't it, Mrs. Durham?"

"It's my book, certainly, Mrs. Palliser," retorted her hostess, allowing for the first time a faint hint of combativeness to creep into her silky tones. "Would it be very indiscreet of me to ask how you happened——"

She paused significantly. Her visitor finished her question for her.

"How I happened to know what was written in your book, Mrs. Durham? Day before yesterday your book was handed to me by mistake, down at the office. I happened to turn the pages, I happened to come on my husband's handwriting. Listen, I will admit to you frankly the other points with which I cannot but connect it." Rapidly and in a voice that began to tremble with her rising emotion, Ellen enumerated briefly the story of the past three days. "Mrs. Durham," she

cried, as she finished, "you understand now why it is that I have no choice but to come to you, don't you? I love my husband. It is impossible that I can live with this horrible doubt between us. Will you give me now the acknowledgment and the reassurance for which I beg you?"

The desperate pleading of her eyes was met with a stony smile. "I have only one acknowledgment and one reassurance to give you, my dear Mrs. Palliser," returned her hostess, with a somewhat bored politeness, "and that is to repeat the fact that I am as ignorant of your husband's private affairs as you yourself appear to be. Mr. Palliser and I are good friends and old acquaintances—nothing more."

"Nor ever were?" asked Ellen, in a low voice.

"Nor ever were," replied the other calmly.

Ellen drew a long breath. With the utterance of this proven lie, it seemed to her that the conversation had passed from a vaguely ladylike discussion into the region of a real and living struggle. And with the suddenness of that realization came the will to fight for her own. With fingers that trembled slightly she opened the gold

bag that hung on her wrist, and drew from it a letter, cream-laid and gold-embossed.

"Look, Mrs. Durham," she said quietly.

The face before her strove hard to maintain its lines of complacent superiority. But in the eyes leaped suddenly the light of recognition and of fear. For a moment the two women confronted each other; and the silence was sharp and tense as that which in a duel precedes the dropping of the handkerchief. Violet spoke first, in a dry and changed tone.

"Did Jim give you that letter, Mrs. Palliser?" she asked.

"You know my husband better than that, Mrs. Durham," returned Ellen briefly. "Mr. Palliser does not even know that I have it. It fell into my hands by accident, two years ago. I have never mentioned it to him. I should never have mentioned it to you had you not refused me all justification of these painful suspicions that have brought me to you."

Violet's lips, as they framed her reply, stood out in startling and metallic brilliance on her white face, and her reply was another question.

"Are you going to show that letter to my husband, Mrs. Palliser?"

"I deserve the reproach of your suspicion," returned Ellen slowly. "It was unworthy of me to read this letter when I came across it, it was unworthy of me to bring it here to-day. But, at least, I brought it with no worse motive than that which I have stated to you; to show you how useless are these denials of the truth between you and me. Again I ask you for the truth—I only ask you, remember, I do not try to buy it. I am no blackmailer, Mrs. Durham. Here is your letter."

Violet's fingers, with their glittering pink nails, closed around the offered document in a clutch which showed at once her agony and her relief. She paused for one instant, to snatch the letter from its envelope, to glance over its contents. Then, as though she could not bear to grant one more instant of life to the thing which had vanquished even her cool self-control, she began tearing letter and envelope together into narrow strips, then crosswise into tiny pieces. She tore viciously, with a crackling of the paper. Then,

with an odd, secretive gesture, she stuffed the handful of rubbish that remained into a convenient vase. When her eyes again met those of her guest it was with a desperate attempt to ignore not only the destroyed document, but the message that it had brought between them.

"Poor old Jim!" she said, with elaborate carelessness. "You must excuse my speaking of him like that, Mrs. Palliser, but, you see, he and I were *such* chums, down there in the office before Mr. Durham married poor little me. It was the most innocent, boy-and-girl flirtation in the world —but I own I wouldn't like to have my husband know of it. He's older than me, you know, and it makes him so ridiculously jealous. But you, Mrs. Palliser, you've more sense, I'm sure. And if a woman's going to worry over her husband's little affairs before he married her——"

"It's not over that I'm worrying, Mrs. Durham," interrupted Ellen calmly, though her heart was pounding. "Mr. Palliser's life before his marriage belongs to him, not to me. But this past week—now that you see how much I know of the truth, Mrs. Durham, won't you set my

mind at rest about this business of the Achaguas papers?"

Violet arched her delicately penciled eyebrows. "As I understand you, Mrs. Palliser, and the facts you have related to me, you are asking me to acknowledge that I went to Mr. Durham's office in his absence, and opened his safe, and stole from him certain papers that I afterward delivered to Jim."

"Not delivered to him yet," interrupted Ellen steadily. "He told me the other day the documents were safe, but not yet in his hands. He promised to let me know when he received them. So, Mrs. Durham, don't you understand what it is that I ask of you?"

"You ask me," returned her hostess, with a defiant smile, "to own myself a criminal. Even supposing I had done what you charge me with, suppose I had, for old sake's sake, made myself a thief in order to save my old friend Jimmy Palliser, don't you think that, if you love him as you claim, you ought to be thanking me on your knees, instead of asking me to run the risk of

divorce and criminal prosecution and all kinds of horrors, just to please you?"

At the ruthless logic of these words Ellen rose and came to her hostess with outstretched hands. The truth which she so dearly loved had at last been uttered between them. And even though, in this case, the truth fought not for but against her, she welcomed it as a gallant enemy with which she had the weapons to cope.

"No, Mrs. Durham, no!" she cried. "Don't you see I'm asking you for nothing of the kind? Don't you understand that, instead of asking you to run any risk of exposure, it would be my interest, as much as my husband's, as much as your own, to hide from everybody the bold stroke by which you saved him? And don't you see that I'd be the first to thank you—on my knees, as you say—if only I could know that it was done for old sake's sake? I can give up to you the privilege of saving him—to you who once loved him and whom he once loved, provided only that I may know that love is all in the past. Tell me that what you did for my husband was done for the sake of the memory of what once

existed between you—for that memory and nothing more!"

Violet hesitated as she twisted the diamond circlet on her plump white wrist. Her voice was slightly unsteady as she answered; and its unguarded inflections, with their suggestions of remote boarding-house days, spoke an agitation which rather surprised her listener.

"And if I should own—well!" Again the glittering circlet spun about on her wrist. "If I should own I have always felt more or less ashamed of the mean trick I played Jimmy five years ago, when I threw him over—poor boy, he *was* cut up, though I'm sure," with an agreeable smile, "he's had it all made up to him since, Mrs. Palliser. But if I should own that I have always felt awfully friendly for him ever since, so that when he came and told me about his trouble and asked me to help, I was just awfully glad to do it—well, then, that would satisfy you? Just good old pals, you understand, nothing more or less. And I'm sure, anyhow, Mrs. Palliser, that anything I've done for dear Jim I've done just as much for your sake as his—and anything I could

do to prove it I'm sure would be done with pleasure; especially after your being so nice about giving me back that silly old letter!"

Violet's speech, with its jumble of facts and protestations, with its galling assertion of ownership in Jim, with its half-acknowledgment of the truth, with its florid offer of friendly service—all this fell in confusion upon Ellen's bewildered and suffering heart. What had she gained, after all, by baring its secrets to this woman who was one moment her enemy, another her friend, shifty and unfathomable always? In the whole baffling medley of Violet's speech, the last words only stood out clear and definite, with a suggestion which struck the flash of a sudden idea from Ellen's whirling brain.

"Mrs. Durham," she said suddenly, "you say that you are my friend—you say that what you have done for my husband you have done for my sake as well as for his—and anything you could do to prove it you would do for me with a real pleasure?"

Violet's head, with its shining marcel waves, bobbed in a nod of assent, but her bright eyes

glanced sideways in an uncontrollable wariness. "A very real pleasure, Mrs. Palliser," she repeated, in mincing accents of elegance.

"Then," cried Ellen desperately, "don't meet him again! Look, I humble my pride to you, I own that the thought of this secret understanding between you and my husband tortures me beyond my endurance. You have told me that your interest in each other is a thing of the past, you can have no possible desire to see him again. Let me be your messenger to him, and I'll accept your kindness for him and for myself, with all the gratitude of my heart. Of your own free will you offered to prove to me that I have no cause for these doubts that are torturing me, and here I point out to you the way that you can prove it. Dear Mrs. Durham, give me the papers and let me take them home to Jim from you!"

Violet hesitated. Her glittering finger-tips toyed with her glittering rings. Then she broke out into a little nervous laugh.

"Now, how ridiculous, my dear Mrs. Palliser! I do assure you, you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. If you are really uneasy for fear

of a flirtation between good old Jimmy and me, then I gave you my word, and I give it to you again, I haven't flirted with him and I won't—not one single scrap. But as for handing over any papers to you, even if I had them——"

"Then you refuse this proof of your friendship, Mrs. Durham, which you offered me of your own accord, and which is the first and only one that I ask of you?"

Violet's fingers twisted together on her lap. She raised her eyes, drew a little, unsteady breath, then answered slowly: "What you ask is impossible, Mrs. Palliser."

Ellen stood for a moment in silence. That the woman before her would grant her the conclusive test that she proposed, she had hardly ventured to hope. But neither had she realized that Violet might dare an outright denial. For Violet to refuse the papers to her was tantamount to the open confession of another meeting, in the near future, between her and Jim. Another meeting—like the last? In a sudden qualm of deadly sickness that seemed almost physical, there rushed back upon her that corroding vision

of last night—the picture of that little dinner-table for two, in what quarter of the city she knew not, where Jim sat and smiled into those hard, beautiful blue eyes, those eyes which grew who could say how soft for him?

The thought evoked in her heart feelings that were new to her experience, and which frightened her even more than the thought of her own desolation. Like a virginal savage struggling against the fumes of newly tasted wine, Ellen fought back the bitter rage and hatred which possessed her. As her eyes surveyed the complacent beauty before her, it seemed to her that her heart understood with terrifying distinctness the impulse under which murder is done.

"Mrs. Durham!" she said in a voice which sounded oddly in her own ears.

Her hostess glanced at her sideways, a little frightened glance. Ellen spoke slowly and distinctly, trying to frame her words not in the pain which racked her, but in the reasonableness of what she felt to be her right.

"Mrs. Durham, as James Palliser's wife I refuse my countenance to this secret association be-

tween you and my husband. I refuse my consent to this aid which you offer in such a manner. And now, I have the honor to wish you a very good day."

"Mrs. Palliser, wait one moment!"

Ellen, turning, was arrested by her hostess' shrill voice, rising suddenly from its laboriously acquired elegance. And from the face which Violet showed her, the mask of cold and dawdling indifference had suddenly dropped away. In the eyes confronting her she read hatred as bitter as that which stirred deep in her own heart, but more vulgarly plain.

"Mrs. Palliser, what do you mean when you say that you refuse your consent to any aid I might offer to Jim?"

"Just that," returned Ellen steadily. "I am going home now to tell my husband that I understand this affair to the fullest detail. And I shall inform him, I must refuse my consent to his being saved in such a manner."

Violet laughed brokenly. In the uneven tone of her voice, in the blood which mantled her white skin, there was evident a strong though concealed

feeling which had power to shake even her stony confidence. She spoke in a tone of laborious gentleness:

"My dear Mrs. Palliser, how droll! Is Jimmy so docile? He didn't *use* to be!"

"My husband would not willingly lose my respect," answered Ellen briefly.

"He would prefer to lose—excuse me, but since we seem to be speaking the truth to each other, you know as well as I do what it is that I have saved him from."

"I myself am prepared to save him from that danger, Mrs. Durham. The aid that he may not accept from another woman, he may with propriety take from his wife."

"You are so sure, then, that it will be so easy to save him?"

"I did not say that it would be easy, Mrs. Durham. But as for being sure—there should be nothing surer, I think, than the possibility of saving an innocent man from the consequence of somebody's else sin."

With a rustle of her shimmering tea-gown, Violet jumped to her feet. Again the peal of

broken laughter fluttered from her lips. In the eyes which she bent upon Ellen, her feeling for Ellen's husband stood suddenly revealed like the irresistible flash of a leaping flame.

And Ellen, meeting the revelation of those eyes, realized for the first time fully the fierce hidden forces against which she had to contend. Against the passion of the woman before her, she had only the force of her own love to bring. Jim Palliser, standing as it were between the two women, was no longer the handsome, easy-going club-man, with the agreeable qualities and the weaknesses of his age and class. He had become suddenly the symbol of forces stronger than life itself. He was the embodiment of that moving spirit which lies beyond personality, which the ancients called Aphrodite and the moderns call the Life Force; but which in any case crumples up every scruple and every other desire like a handful of straw.

The two women glared at each other, and Violet laughed again.

"An innocent man, Mrs. Palliser? What do you mean?"

"Just that. As you know, my husband has committed no crime."

"Then—pardon me—what is this danger from which he has to be saved, either by you or by me?"

"You know, Mrs. Durham. Under false pretenses, your husband obtained from Jim those papers which show him guilty of a crime which he never committed. If those papers are brought into court then my husband, who is innocent, must be held responsible for the missing funds which were in reality appropriated and lost by Mr. Durham himself."

Violet's glittering hands caught at a chair-back for support. She rocked back and forth with laughter. Her eyes shone strangely bright in her colorless face.

"My dear woman, what are you saying? Do I really understand you correctly? Do you mean to say you believe that Jim is *innocent?*"

Ellen lifted her head haughtily. "My husband is an innocent man. I have his word for it," she returned, with cold precision.

Violet's laughter rippled in broken gasps of amusement. "Excuse me for laughing this way, Mrs. Palliser, but really it strikes me as too comical! So Jimmy has been telling you that he never borrowed a cent of the Patroons money, never lost it in Wall Street, never did anything but sign papers for the naughty villain that plotted to throw all the blame on him afterward —just like the hero in the play! Poor old Jimmy! And I've given him away! But how would I suspect that he'd ever given you a hot-air gag like that, Mrs. Palliser? And you mean to say, you *believed* him?"

"I believed him, and I believe him now," answered Ellen in an unfaltering voice, though her heart was sick within her in a strange new qualm unknown until now. The illusion of being suspended over a bottomless abyss, which had visited her yesterday, had returned with a reality of sensation which nearly overcame her.

After all, what security had she that in the tale of Mr. Durham's elaborate treachery, Jim had spoken the truth? His bare word.

In a flash of memory that smote her like a

physical blow, she remembered Mr. Durham's benignant yet stern surprise, when two days ago she had charged him with the crime which Jim had attributed to him. She remembered Belden's face of unbelief, his refusal to appear as his friend's champion on the strength of the latter's unsupported word. She remembered what the keenest lawyer in New York, according to Jim's own acknowledgment, had said. One and all, they had swept aside as absurd the scapegoat story that was Jim's defense. They had accepted the facts, they had refused his word. She alone had accepted his word, as she accepted God's. But now in his concealed association with this woman once openly beloved, he had struck straight at the very foundations of his wife's faith in him. How could she be certain of him any more? How could she ever be certain of anything again?

Jim, an embezzler? Jim, her husband, a liar and a sneak?

Thought was crushed from her mind. She was conscious only of a rising vertigo. Though beneath it stirred an instinct which bade her con-

ceal her anguish from the cynical blue eyes that regarded her.

"Guess you aren't quite so certain, after all, Mrs. Palliser," remarked Violet softly.

With a fierce stiffening of her muscles, Ellen controlled herself. The sickness passed. Her forces were her own again as she replied:

"I believed my husband, Mrs. Durham. I believe him still absolutely and without question!"

"That is," returned Violet, with another ripple of her keen-edged laughter, "you believe what he told *you,* or what he told *me!*"

The intimacy thus implied was to Ellen like a blow in her face. She spoke with cold determination and a deliberate thrust.

"It seems more reasonable, Mrs. Durham, that Jim should speak the truth to me, his wife who loves him, than to you, an outsider and a stranger. And now, it really seems to me that we have nothing more left to say to each other."

As she turned again with a brief gesture of farewell, Violet came swooping down upon her. Her face was crimson, her eyes were sparkling, wide open. Passion was in her glance, in her

voice as she spoke; passion long-pent, but now stirred to the quick and bursting from its restraint.

"An outsider and a stranger!" she cried in hoarse repetition of Ellen's words. "How dare you, Mrs. Palliser? How dare you call me that —me, who saved Jim from jail and worse? Me, who ran risks to save him that *you* wouldn't run, though you are his wife and so proud of it! And he knows it! He knows that I'd do for him what you wouldn't do! Wasn't it to me he came when he needed help? Wasn't it to me he told the truth—the truth he was scared to tell to you? You call me an outsider if you like, but when the pinch came it was me he trusted, not you. He came to me—do you know why? Do you know why?"

Her face, kindled to a wild and ferocious beauty, was thrust up into Ellen's. The reckless abandon of her triumph thrilled in her voice and rustled in the very swish of her robe. The breath of her violet perfume rose from her like a stifling aura, sickening Ellen with her physical nearness. "You know why?" Violet repeated

"AN OUTSIDER AND A STRANGER! HOW DARE YOU CALL ME THAT—ME, WHO SAVED JIM FROM JAIL AND WORSE?"

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with exultation. "You know why Jim came to me and not to you?"

Ellen stood silent. She had the strange sensation of the hunter who, after long tracking of a man-eater, meets at last the destructive horror in the flesh and the very act.

"Because he loves me!" cried Violet. The words seemed to tear themselves from her lips, as though uttered by some force stronger than her worldly prudence, or her sense of expediency and shrewdness. She was possessed by the hysteria of her long-restrained emotion. She seemed actuated by a very fury of desire to trample under foot the woman who had denied her right in the man she claimed.

"He loves me, Jim does!" she cried again in a voice that thrilled and ran with the violence of her feeling. "He loves me, and I love him! Ever since the old days when we belonged to each other—to each other, do you understand that? But I threw him over because I thought I loved money more, so I gave him up for this!" She flung out her arm in a gesture of furious contempt. "Then I found out my mistake. I

broke his heart, then I found out I'd broken my own! But I knew he'd come back to me some day, so I waited. Nobody knew, but I was waiting. And at last he came, he came!"

Ellen took in her breath. Her tortured eyes, roving to the doorway behind her hostess, met suddenly the glance of another pair of eyes, grim and watchful. The listener had crept upon them like a shadow, but stood there in flesh-and-blood reality. He raised his hand in a gesture that commanded silence. Ellen's first impulse was to compass her own revenge by giving no warning to the frenzied woman before her. Her second was more generous. She clutched Violet's outstretched arm.

"Hush, Mrs. Durham, hush!" she said imperatively.

"I won't!" screamed Violet. "I love Jim Palliser and he loves me! We belong to each other, do you understand that?. Do you understand?"

"Mr. Durham," said Ellen quietly, addressing the figure in the doorway, "I will leave your wife to you. I am afraid that she is very ill."

Mr. Durham came forward slowly. In spite

of her abhorrence of the man, Ellen was forced to admire the perfection of his self-control as he laid his withered hand upon his wife's white shoulder.

"Violet!" he said.

She spun around to confront him. His face was a peculiar ashen tint which at one stroke had added twenty years to his age. His clean-shaven jaw was firmly clenched, but the throbbing pulse in his cheek showed the feeling within; and his eyes were those of a man who looks on an open grave.

"Violet!" he said again huskily.

She shook his hand from her shoulder with a violence which for the moment overcame even that imperious touch.

"You know now!" she cried, with a shaking burst of laughter. "Very well, it can't be helped. And at least I haven't got to kill myself with keeping silent, as I have done all these years. What do I care? For if I suffer, that woman has got to suffer, too!" Her shaking hand flung itself out in a gesture toward the shrinking Ellen. "It's all your doing!" she screamed again,

in a very luxury of hysteria. "You wouldn't let me save Jim, and now he's lost. You can whistle for those papers. Do you think I'll stir a finger now to save him? Do you think my husband will be inclined to spare him, after this? No, Jim Palliser is bound straight for Sing Sing now, and it's you that sent him there! It's you that sent him there, remember that!"

Between the white face of Ellen and the stricken age of her husband, Violet's bright figure glowed like that of a Mænad transported with the rage of her own ungoverned passion. Of the three unself-conscious beings, Ellen Palliser was the first to recover herself. Not only the insults of her hostess, but the despair which sat like death on the wrinkled face of the man beside her, made any attempt at formal leave-taking an impossible thing. Turning her back on the two desperate beings who stood like wax statues before her, she walked softly from the room and from the house.

As Mrs. Durham had said, her meddling had served only to bring ruin to all concerned. The suffering which an hour ago had been hers alone

was now by her act the common property of all four. And above the memory of the despair she had left behind her, above the revelation of his guilt, of his love for another woman, dinned and pounded the relentless truth of Violet's last words.

Jim Palliser was bound straight for Sing Sing and it was she herself—she herself, his wife, who had sent him there!

CHAPTER XII.

The Seed of Suspicion.

It was ten o'clock before Palliser turned the key of his apartment and entered; for his wife, on her return home three hours before, had been met by Nikeda with a telephone-message from the master of the house, telling that he could not be home to dinner and might not be home till late. He was now returning home, to tell the truth, rather earlier than he had intended. Disappointment lay on his face. His handsome features were clouded with a vague trouble which might, or might not be accounted for by the headlines of the evening paper over which, as he laid down his hat and coat, he threw a hasty eye:

Williams & Co. suspend. Another Big Brokerage House Goes to the Wall. Bad Slump in Prices. Nervousness of Traders. Disquieting Rumors Involve Trust Companies. Durham of the Patroons Declares in an Interview——

With a gesture of impatience Palliser threw

the paper to the floor. Then he raised his voice and cried:

"Ellen!"

There was no answer. He called again. A few steps brought him to the door of her bedroom. It was empty. He turned hastily toward the little drawing-room.

"Nelly, dear, where are you?"

Again no answer. But as he entered the firelit room, he beheld her sitting by the hearth.

The face which she turned toward him was fixed and white in the firelight, with a look of grief so dreadful as to bring him up all standing in the doorway.

"Ellen, my dearest. What has happened?"

He ran toward her as though to take her in his arms. She shrank away, and forced her colorless lips into a smile that was like the convulsive clenching of a fist.

"Nothing has happened, Jim. Sit down, dear. I want to talk to you."

Her words and gesture were those of affection, but her eyes were the eyes of doubt. For a mo-

ment, brief as the whistling of a bullet, they looked at each other. Then Ellen spoke again.

"Jim, have you the papers?"

He started, hesitated. "The evening paper, dear? It's in the hall. I'm afraid there's a bad crash coming——"

"No, Jim, you know what papers I mean. The Achaguas papers, that were to save you from jail. Have they been given to you yet?"

Again Palliser hesitated. The look of care-worn perplexity that had darkened his bright face upon his entrance fell again over the keener fear with which he regarded his wife. But he spoke cheerfully:

"No, my dear. To tell the truth, they were to be handed me to-night, at dinner. But for some reason the party failed to make connections. But don't worry, darling, I'll surely have them to-morrow."

Ellen rose to her feet. Her voice was torn from her like the cry of a trapped quarry:

"No, Jim, you won't have them to-morrow!"

His jaw dropped. He remained staring at her.

"You'll never have them now, Jim. Never, never!"

She sank back into her chair and covered her face. With a swift change of expression her husband bent over her.

"Ellen," he said, with determination, "what are you talking about? What do you know about those papers?"

Her voice came muffled from behind her palms.

"Jim, I went to see Violet Durham this afternoon."

There was a pause, while the clock ticked and the logs crackled upon the hearth. With eyes that took curious note of each detail, Palliser stared at their leaping flames and ramparts of rosy white ash. Ellen's head was bent, and her stillness was not the stillness of living flesh but of death.

The man spoke first, after a deep breath.

"Then that explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"Why I didn't have the papers to-night as was agreed. I'll never have them now of course, as

you say. Ellen, why did you go to Violet Durham?"

"Because—I had found out. I couldn't ask you. I had to be certain. So I went and asked her."

"Precisely." Palliser's tone was dry and expressionless. "And what did she tell you, my dear?"

"She told me everything, Jim—everything!"

"Ah! That was kind of her, indeed. And what happened then?"

"Mr. Durham came in."

"What?"

"Mr. Durham came in, Jim."

Palliser turned his head slowly. "And how much was told to him?"

Ellen swallowed hard before she could answer the truth. "Everything."

"What? You told, or Violet told?"

"Neither of us. He heard. He understands everything now. Even if she forgives, he never will."

"Ah!" At these last words, Palliser's irritation against his chief overcame even his mount-

ing despair. "And was anybody looking for Mr. Durham's forgiveness?"

She raised her head. "You don't understand, dear Jim. He had promised to let me buy those papers from him, myself. Now, of course, the idea is useless."

Palliser whistled between his teeth. His face was curiously constricted. "You are right! The medicine is poured and we must drink it. Now that the old scoundrel knows how nearly he was outwitted, he won't be turned aside again of course."

"My dear Jim, why do you call him an old scoundrel?" Ellen's voice was one of an infinite sadness.

The color leaped into Jim Palliser's dark cheek. "Ellen, you have ruined me. But I make you no reproaches for your interference, as you will please notice. But this is a bit too much. You ask me why I call Durham a scoundrel—*you?*"

Ellen met his angry eyes with a grieved firmness. "Yes, Jim, I. Didn't I tell you, Mrs. Durham has told me everything?"

"Indeed!" returned her husband, with the suspicion of a sneer. "And did the *everything* which she so kindly confided to you, include the information that her husband is not what I have called him?"

Ellen's anguish broke suddenly from the bonds in which she had confined it. Her voice went in a long shattering cry.

"Jim, don't! I have ruined you, I own that. I have to be ashamed for myself—don't force me to be ashamed for my husband, too!"

Her words did not move him, though the red flush faded from his face. He surveyed her doggedly.

"If you choose to be ashamed for your husband's misfortune you may do so, Ellen, though I own it is not what I had expected from you. As for enlisting the help of an old friend to steal back the documents that incriminated me, I will own the proceeding was a doubtful one. But after all, my dear child, it was my own property, wrongfully withheld, that was stolen back for me. And you, yourself, if you remember, had told me to use any means I found possible!"

"Yes, Jim, I did and I meant it. But oh, my dearest—why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me?"

Over Palliser's face of brooding desperation fell a slight shade of embarrassment. "I should have, probably—I wanted to. But you see, the business was a risky one for Mrs. Durham, and when she made a condition of strict secrecy——"

"That's not what I mean, Jim! I could bear that. But why didn't you tell me what you told her?"

Palliser took a step toward her. She rose to her feet. Their eyes were nearly on a level. He spoke in a quick breath.

"I told you everything, Ellen. What do you mean?"

"Why do you ask me that question, Jim? You know what I mean. You trusted that other woman with the truth. Why couldn't you have trusted me—me who love you so?"

He gripped her hands as though he would wring her thought from her finger-tips. "Ellen, tell me what Violet has told you!"

"She only told me what you told her, Jim; that

you are guilty of the crime that those papers prove against you."

The stillness of the room was oppressive. The fire, fallen to glowing fluff, had ceased to utter its tiny cannonade. In a thrill of the automatic consciousness which seemed the only part of her to remain alive, Ellen gave thanks for the pain of her tortured fingers. That pain, at any rate, she could bear.

When Palliser spoke again, it was in a changed voice. His wife's last words had removed the dispute between them from the field of distracted emotions, into the larger arena of the affairs of men.

"What are you saying, Ellen?" he asked harshly.

"Mrs. Durham told me that you had admitted the truth to her, but that I had been purposely kept in the dark."

Palliser dropped her hands, and took a turn or two about the room. Then he came back and stood before her drooping figure.

"And you believed her, Ellen?"

She made a gesture of despair. "How do I

know? When she told me what was so much worse, and what I *had* to believe!"

Her husband started violently. "Worse than embezzlement and falsehood—what next, Ellen?"

"She told me—that you loved her. That you had loved her for years."

Palliser drew a long breath. His face, if not his voice, said: *"Is that all?"* Then he recurred with fierce insistence to the first accusation. His agitation was visible.

"So you're going back on me, too, Ellen? You're going to believe it was for myself I initialed those fraudulent notes of Henderson's?"

"What do I know?" cried Ellen again wearily. "And what do I care?"

He flushed a dull brick-red. "I understand you, my dear. Now that I am in trouble, you don't care about me any more. Wasn't it enough to give me a demonstration of this fact, by smashing up the defense that would have saved me from disgrace?"

His tongue stumbled on the word. Horror of

the fate that now lay before him was written on his face. But he controlled himself to add:

"Don't you think you might have spared me the open information that you have ceased to care, Ellen?"

The torturing emotion which for a day and a half had strung Ellen's nerves to their highest tension rose even above the intolerable self-reproach stirred up by her husband's words. The blood rushed to her face and the words to her lips:

"And what did you think I cared about?" she cried. "For money? For business? For banks and rubber companies, and all those trifling outside things that you men hold so important? What does any woman care for childish things like that, except as they affect the man she loves? And I love you. Do you understand what that means? I love you! And beside that fact, what does it matter whether or not you have borrowed money that didn't belong to you, and were cheated out of your hope of paying it back? What does it matter if in the eyes of all the world you are an embezzler and a thief—or even in

your own eyes? For me, you are yourself, that's all I know. And what does it matter how great your trouble and your need, so long as you bring your need to me? It's not what's given a woman that satisfies her heart—it's what she is allowed to give; and the greater the need of the man she loves, the greater her opportunity, the greater her joy! You needn't have been afraid to give me your confidence, Jim. I would have only loved you the better for it because I could have given you so much the more; pity and understanding, as well as the few dollars I could scrape together. You remember, I told you how I tried? No, I don't want you to thank me—it's I that owe you the thanks. If you could know the happiness of those days when I thought I was saving you! The joy! The delight!"

She paused, with her hand at her throat. Her husband turned desperately.

"Ellen!" he said.

She interrupted him.

"No! I've done you enough harm since, I own that. But I want you to understand how it came about. I want you to understand what I felt

when from one little thing and another little thing, the truth suddenly stood up in front of me."

She paused a moment, and her voice fell from its high tones of challenge into its somber depths. She went on in slow and measured tones:

"While I was working to save you, Jim, you were with that other woman. It was to her you brought your need, and not to me. It was from her hands you took your safety, and not from mine. You accepted her sacrifice and rejected mine—and you never told me. If you had told me, Jim, I might have suffered but I could have understood. But it was all kept a secret from me—from me, your wife."

"It was kept a secret from you," returned her husband in laborious explanation, "because Mrs. Durham, in running so grave a risk, naturally demanded absolute secrecy as to her part in the affair."

"Naturally," returned Ellen dryly. Then, in a tone that showed how she winced from her husband's last words: "So grave a risk, Jim! You yourself give me the word I need, to explain

what I have felt. Under what circumstances does a woman risk her very name and position and honor for a man? And what does she expect in return?"

Palliser stirred uneasily. "I don't understand you, Ellen."

"You do, Jim," she returned steadily, "and I think I have the right to ask you now: What is there between this woman and you that you felt at liberty to go to her with a demand so immense?"

Jim hesitated a moment. Despite her judicial utterance, it was in an intolerable agony of suspense that Ellen awaited his reply. For the moment they had forgotten the looming disgrace and worldly ruin which only a few days before had spelled life or death for them, and which must again. As they stood confronting each other, eternal forces held them in a grip which excluded every other consideration, no matter how poignant. After a mental struggle which showed itself in his mobile face, Jim Palliser spoke.

"You ask me why I went to Violet Durham

for help, Ellen? Because I happened to know that, in spite of a few surface vagaries, she is at heart a good sort who could be relied on to do a kind turn for an old friend. You ask me how I happened to know that with such certainty? Very well. I would prefer not to have thrust the matter on your attention at all, but since you have found out so much for yourself, I will admit that Violet and I once were—well, what is vulgarly called awful spoons on each other. A pretty woman like that, right there in the office, at your elbow every day. And I didn't have so many friends in the city as I have now. Well—you understand? If Durham, by the curious freak which sometimes overtakes an elderly man, hadn't cut in and married her, I dare say I would have married her myself. At all events, I was all bowled over when she did throw me down; though I recovered as you know. There, my dear, is the whole truth, which sounds sufficiently brutal as I relate it to you. Do you thank me now for the silence in which I held this portion of my life, or do you want some more?"

Palliser spoke rapidly, recklessly, conscious of

the stabs which each word inflicted upon the quivering woman who faced him. She paused a moment to take her breath before she ventured the question with which she answered him:

"One thing more, Jim. Then you—loved her?"

Palliser's annoyance began to show itself at this cross-questioning on a subject for him so extraneous to the real concern of the moment. He answered with deliberation:

"My dear, when I offered you my affection, did I make any pretense that it was a white sheet of paper that had never been written upon? I wish to the Lord it could have been, but at least I never made any pretense, and you took me as I was. And since you ask me pointblank, I'll answer you pointblank: Yes, in the old days before I met you, and when Violet used to meet me down-town for dinner every night, I think I loved her very much indeed."

This admission, made not concerning a woman who hung phantomlike in the past, but one whose ample beauty Ellen had with her own eyes beheld that very afternoon, struck her with a hor-

rible constriction of natural pain. Her voice was a mere whisper as she asked:

"And—that was all, Jim?"

Her husband regarded her steadily. "I see what you mean, Ellen. And I beg to assure you that except for the trifle of throwing over one man to marry another, Violet Durham is as honest a woman as ever lived."

Ellen hesitated. The dreadful words of the afternoon hung still like a scorching cloud over her soul. Certainty she must have, if only for the chance of throwing off this unspeakable oppression.

"Honest with the conventional honesty of woman, Jim, or with the honesty of a human being? Because—forgive me—she can only have one! Am I to believe what you say of her now, or what she herself told me this afternoon?"

"You seem to have had a real heart-to-heart talk with Violet Durham, Ellen," returned her husband, with a kind of desperate coldness. "May I ask, what confidence you refer to now?"

Ellen repeated the words which had penetrated her soul.

"She told me, Jim, that she loved you and that you loved her. She said: 'We belong to each other, Jim and I.'"

These words, which in their sordid finality had seemed to sever all confidence and all bonds between the married pair, were spoken at last and referred to the one who alone could judge them. Ellen leaned back in her chair like one exhausted, shading her eyes with her hand as though from the fading embers of the nearly dead fire.

"And you believed her, Ellen?" asked Palliser hoarsely.

"Would she blacken her own character for nothing, Jim?" returned his wife.

Palliser hesitated, then spoke as though with difficulty.

"Violet Durham, Ellen, is a peculiar woman. For all her worldliness, she is consumed with a passion for romance. In the old days at the office, there was always a paper-covered novel at the back of her desk. She had dreams of turning out a heroine, herself—when she married Durham, I know she thought it was the first step. Well! That disappointed her, so she turns to

working up dreams about the past again. And she's the kind that oughtn't to be allowed to dream—nervous, morbid, that kind of thing, you understand? Yes, she's a strange one, Violet is! You'd think to look at her that she was hard as nails. She isn't. She's a neurotic. You've noticed her curious habit of gnawing at her lips, and pulling at the rings on her hands? Nerves, nerves all over! Why, I remember down at the office, the hysterical fits she used to have, when work had been very heavy or she'd been going it a bit strong after hours. If Durham hadn't been soft on her, he never would have stood it. Hysterical fits—screaming and kicking, poor girl, you understand? And when she got taken with a fit like that, she'd blurt out anything."

"Even the truth?" asked Ellen quickly.

Palliser made a gesture of surrender. "A fair point. But in this case, poor Violet blackened herself without cause or foundation. Her weariness in her own married life may have caused her to maintain a romantic ideal of our past attachment—but it was not to that, I give you my honest word, that I appealed in asking

her for her help in my troubles. Since the letter she sent me announcing her marriage, five years ago, not a word of love has been spoken between us. In our recent relations, we have met only as friends. In accusing herself of—of other relations with me, she spoke in hysterical self-deception; perhaps—how do I know?—in a wish to revenge herself on you for what she felt as your interference. Will you believe that this is the truth, Ellen? I give you my word of honor as a gentleman."

"Your word of honor as a gentleman," returned Ellen sadly, "but don't you see, that is just what makes your word good for nothing? It is because you are a gentleman that you are bound to defend Mrs. Durham's character; and the more she needs your defense, the more your honor requires that you defend her."

They looked at each other helplessly, as each recognized the truth of her words. From between them the whole happiness of undoubting faith had been swept away. Ellen saw in her husband only the man who in spirit, if not in sordid fact, had broken his most sacred vows.

Palliser saw in his wife only the woman whose exacting jealousy had wrecked all chance of escape from the criminal prosecution that waited for him. And in neither was any power to repair the past, or to mend up broken faith.

In a kind of mechanical bitterness, Palliser reverted to his wife's last words.

"And does my honor as a gentleman also require that I lie to you concerning my own conduct in the Achaguas affair, whether I am actually guilty of embezzlement or not?"

"I don't know," returned Ellen helplessly. "Since yesterday morning, the whole foundation of life seems gone. I believe you, of course. But do I *know?*"

Palliser's lips pinched themselves together in a hard dry line. In the wreck which he and fate together had made of his affairs, he had clung desperately to his wife's belief in his innocence; a belief which, as he knew, could be counted upon to persist in the face of legal proofs, of common sense, of the evidence of her own senses.

But now he had struck deeper. By his carelessness or that of some one else, he had under-

mined the very roots of her faith. The foundations, as she had said, were gone; and through his own fault he was left shelterless in the time of his need. A hot wave of dull anger broke through him. Who was it after all that had snatched from him the defenses that he himself, with some outside aid, had erected?

"You are right, Ellen," he said, "you have no way of knowing whether it was in my own behalf or Durham's that I indorsed those notes, which have robbed the Patroons Trust of a half-million dollars. It's a case of my word against my admitted signature; and since, as you say, my word has ceased to count with you, then how can I expect you to accept it as evidence? Any more than I can expect the bank examiners to accept it, or the directors of the Patroons Trust, or the jury of twelve good men and true who will presently have the pleasure of meeting me. What's the word of a solitary man, against the documentary evidence which has now gone back to Durham?" He stopped, and wrenched his grimly smiling mouth with his hand. "It's a rather tough position for a man to be in, isn't it," he

observed, "because his wife happened to be jealous of him? I don't say it wasn't thoughtless of me, to go to poor Violet as I did. But you will own that, for her as well as for me, the result is rather out of proportion to the initial course—however bad you may make it."

Ellen made no answer. She had reached the stage of suffering where emotional and physical exhaustion acts for the moment as its own anodyne. She leaned back in her chair, watching her husband as he tramped restlessly up and down the room.

Suddenly he stopped short before her. "So here we are," he observed, with another little laugh, "after all the fuss and all the pother, back again where we were a week ago. Except with the difference, that now the single loophole is stuffed." He paused, and over his high, clear-cut features came a sudden look that brought Ellen's soul fluttering back from its mists of weariness. "You objected to my own first solution of the matter," he said. "Ellen, do you still refuse?"

The whole confusion of her mind seemed il-

luminated by a kind of dreadful light. She was conscious only that she loved him. She stretched out her arms to him.

"I still refuse!" she cried in a voice that thrilled with a deeper agony than that which on a former occasion she had sent over the telephone. "Jim, I have done enough to injure you. Don't make me your murderess, my dear!"

He did not seem to notice her gesture. Her arms sank back to her sides. "Perhaps, my dear Ellen," he returned coldly, "you will think differently when the men in uniform are walking in at the door and you see the Black Maria waiting outside."

"Promise me," she cried, leaping convulsively to her feet, "promise me that you won't touch yourself to-night!"

"I promise," he said, with indifference, and then added kindly: "So far as that is concerned, you may sleep in peace, my dear. Run along now and go to bed, dear—go to bed."

His voice had the gentleness of despair, and he sighed as he turned from her. She touched him timidly on the arm.

"Jim, say that you forgive me."

"I forgive you, dear, of course. In return, do you believe in *me?*"

"Yes," said her unsteady lips. But in her eyes, his could read plainly the doubt that is the tragic child of knowledge. And she in the tones of his forgiveness could feel how far her very need of it had lowered her from the serene preeminence which his love had always accorded her.

"She hasn't lived up to her name, your thoroughbred, has she?" she observed in a trembling voice. "Good night, Jim!"

"Good night, dear," he said.

She left him standing by the fireplace, still staring at the pallid heap of ashes.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Price of the Papers.

Like a plastic image, Ellen stood in her room while Armandine undressed her. The very process of going to bed seemed farcical. It appeared to her that she would never sleep again.

Suddenly the door-bell thrilled.

Ellen started and panted. Who could it be, that came so late? Her attention, high-keyed in its fear of officers of the law, was instantly alert through her overwearied frame.

As Armandine went off to answer the bell, her mistress followed her as far as the door of her room. With her negligée wrapped about her, and her comb thrust half-way through the loosened hair, Ellen listened at the half-open door. In a faint reaction of her straining consciousness, she told herself that now she was properly punished for her heartlessness in pursuing these ordinary cares of the toilet, at the time of such extremity which she herself had wrought. If

Mr. Durham, urged not only by self-preservation but by jealous rage, had already acted—if the warrant for Jim's arrest had been sworn out, and police had come for him, how could she disgrace him by showing herself in her present state of undress, to say good-by?

The thought, though outwardly trivial, was one of sharp agony. She listened to Armandine's steps going down the hall, to the murmur of voices at the door, to the brisk steps of the little Frenchwoman as she returned to the drawing-room. Evidently, it was Jim who was sought. Her fear leaped to a frantic certainty. He was lost, and it was she who had betrayed him. For the first time, it seemed to her that she realized the full baseness of her conduct of the afternoon.

In a little furious impulse of the fear which, as a little girl, had driven her always from the sight of "anything horrid happening," she shut her door and flung herself face downward on her bed. Panic fear was on her; panic remorse and panic shame. Jim was a prisoner, Jim was a criminal. Guilty or innocent, the actual ruin was

all the same. And it was her doing. To this extremity her love had brought him.

Self-contempt shook her from head to foot like an ague. Her love! What was it after all, her love that she had given in so glad a pride, and which had called down on her beloved a disaster worse than death? Love! Was it love after all that she had given?

"Ellen!" called her husband's voice.

The tones were stern and high. They came through the closed doors like the call of a muffled bugle. Ellen, weakened by her long and distressing vigil, huddled closer between her pillows, and buried her face like a child.

"Ellen, come here!" called her husband's voice again.

This time she rose to her feet and walked stiffly to the door. Her hand shook as she opened it, but all her self-consciousness was gone. Her straight yellow hair fell about her like a glistening sheet, as with her comb still in her hand she walked slowly toward the drawing-room.

The chill of the room struck against her bare shoulders as she entered. But she saw nothing

but her husband, standing alone in the middle of the floor. At any rate, he was alone. What she had feared was not yet. In a shock of relief that drove every other thought from her mind, she sprang toward him.

"Jim! I was so frightened!" she cried out like a child. Then as she perceived a letter in his hand: "What is it? Anything—anything about ——" Her voice faltered, and the comb dropped from the unsteady fingers that she extended toward her husband.

For answer he thrust into her hand a long manila envelope, directed to him in an immense black handwriting, and torn open on one side.

"You may look," he said.

Her eyes were still fixed on his as she drew the folded paper from within. Then she looked down. In her hand she held a number of official-looking documents, some pale blue, others white. They fluttered about her to the floor, as with her shaking hand she opened the first at random. The words stared up at her in a familiar hand.

Place proceeds to account of B. K. Henderson.
(Signed) J. M. P.

"Jim!" she cried. "It's the Henderson notes!"

The blood sang through her brain. She stared up as a condemned criminal raises his eyes from the document which reprieves him from immediate death.

Palliser nodded. "And the Achaguas vouchers, too—the whole business is there in your hands." His face, though composed, wore the same look of weariness as when she had seen it last. The joy that had moved his wife so immensely seemed not to have touched him at all. "You see, Mrs. Durham changed her mind, after all."

After the ugly reality of her recent terror, even the pain evoked by the other woman's name on Jim's lips passed high over her head. After what she had known of the certainty of arrest, after what she had mistaken for its immediate fulfilment, the rending pangs of jealousy seemed small indeed. Her thought was no longer for herself, but for her husband.

"I'm so glad! I'm so glad!" she whispered passionately.

Palliser's face did not change. He held out

to her another open envelope which still remained in his hand—a delicate little envelope, crested and sealed in violet. As he turned it over, he displayed his own name, written in the same great handwriting as on the envelope of documents.

"Ellen, I am resolved to have no more secrets from you in this affair. If you choose, you shall read this letter," he said briefly.

She recoiled. For the first time, she realized how she had sunk in his opinion. "Read another woman's letter? No, Jim," she returned proudly. Then she added in sudden timidity: "How did she manage to send you the papers, dear?"

"Through her maid, and a special messenger, and a trifle of ingenuity," he returned grimly. "It seems, there have been some fearful times up there—the old man is nearly out of his head, she says; talks about divorce, about shooting me, about shooting her, every one in fact but himself. However, she managed to hide the papers, and get them off to me." He turned, and began again his restless march up and down the little

room. "Ellen, it's for you to decide. Shall I accept them?"

"My dearest Jim!" She turned to him in an irrepressible outburst of gratitude that seemed to warm her chilled and wearied body in a flush of vital heat. "My dearest, do you really think me so wicked? I'll go to her to-morrow and thank her myself on my knees, if she will let me —if she won't, I'll thank her in my heart all the rest of the days of my life."

Palliser stopped before her. "You refuse to read her letter, Ellen," he said, "and I respect you, of course, for your refusal. But I am bound to admit, the contents would pain you. They have pained me. You told me what Violet told you this afternoon, concerning her present feelings for me. I denied it because I had no reason to believe it true. This letter—proves that she told you the truth."

His voice went low in obvious embarrassment and distress. Then he forced his eyes to meet his wife's, from which their glow of joy had faded.

"It is universally acknowledged, I believe," he went on firmly, "that a man who betrays the

woman who honors him with such a confidence, makes himself worthy of the name of cad. But in this case, Ellen, as you have already been made to suffer so much in this affair, I think it is only your right that I should inform you openly; it is not in the spirit that I had believed, that Violet offers me this service. I sought her as a friend. I believed she served me as a friend. Now, to my deep regret, I find that the five years have not made in her the complete change they have made in me. She offers me these papers, Ellen, as the man who by seeking her aid openly avowed himself as her admirer, and who now in accepting it——" He broke off abruptly. "Ellen," he added, "do you still authorize me to accept these papers?"

Ellen glanced sharply around. It still seemed to her that she saw the eyes and badges of policemen glaring at her from behind every curtain. Before the sickening reality of her recent shock, her own emotional tortures had faded into the dim regions of imaginary things. Jim was now the object of primary importance, not as the man she loved, but as a man in the world of men.

Jim, the light-hearted Don Juan, where was the essential horror of that idea? But James Palliser, the justly convicted malefactor!

She stooped to the floor, and hurriedly snatched together the scattered papers. "*Do* I authorize you to accept them, Jim?" she said, with a little choked laugh. Then with the same hurried movements, she ran to the wood-box and took out a handful of excelsior and kindling.

"What are you doing, Nelly?"

"Just rekindling the fire. The radiator is cold, as usual. And I'm chilly, in this little lace rag!"

He pushed her aside. "Of course. Let me do it for you, dear!"

She watched him warily, as the bright blaze leaped upon the hearth. As he stood back, she leaned down with a quick movement which his quicker word arrested. "What are you doing now, Nelly?"

"Just burning up these horrid papers," she answered smoothly. "You don't object, do you, dear?"

With a light hand on her shoulder, he pushed her back into her chair. "I do object. This fire

is to warm your poor little feet. Now, if you will give me back those papers, dear!"

She put her hands behind her in a kind of desperate playfulness. "But I like to hold them, dearest! It gives me a sense of certainty, of safety. But their ashes would be more satisfactory yet. Why won't you give me their ashes?"

"Because I haven't decided yet, Ellen."

In spite of the newly glowing warmth she shivered. The gravity of his tone carried their conversation back to something of its recent distress.

"You haven't decided what, Jim?"

"Whether I, as a man of honor, can accept this great service from a woman who—who may expect such thanks as I cannot give her."

The certainty afforded by these words, which a short time ago would have given their hearer so blessed a relief, was now as nothing beside the vague terrors that they inspired.

"Nonsense!" she answered sharply. "It's all very well to talk of honor, but this is a case of

jail. And what alternative would you propose? To send the papers back again?"

She spoke in fierce irony, but the reply was gravely serious: "That is, as you say, one possible alternative, my dear."

Something in the face bent down toward hers caught her suddenly about her heart. She made a swift gesture toward the fire. He caught her hand and the docket of papers in it.

"No!" he said.

She felt the firmness of his muscular grip upon her fingers, the strength of his will in his voice. She raised her eyes to his in a sudden timidity. For the first time she realized that this man to whom in these last few days she had given her pity and her protection, her jealous suspicion and her pardon; whom even in her deepest love she had never ceased to patronize as a being weaker than herself—for the first time she realized that he was stronger than she. In becoming his own master he had become hers as well.

But over the deep thrill of triumph born of this new realization was laid a strangling fear. No less than before, her task was to save him

from himself; but now by the arts and pleadings of the one confessedly the weaker, luring the stronger from the path which both knew equally to be the best. From his guiding and sustaining angel, she had now become the wife of every-day commonplace, whose love urges her husband toward the safety of the expedient, rather than the perils of the honorable way.

"Dear, are you crazy?" she cried. "Are you giving up the fight now that we have won it? Are you pushing us back again into that horrible black hole of distress, where we were hanging a half-hour ago? It was like death! I couldn't bear it again. I couldn't! To hear you speak of—of putting an end to yourself, or to think of you dragged away from your home, away from me! What do I care what thanks Mrs. Durham expects of you? She can have them! She can have them! And my thanks, too, Jim! My darling, my beloved husband, I kneel to you. Let me burn these papers! Let me burn these papers!"

She slid to his feet, a little desolate heap of falling laces and loosened shining hair. Her

"I KNEEL TO YOU. LET ME BURN THESE PAPERS! LET ME BURN THESE PAPERS!"

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weariness, her distress, had taken from her the dignity of which they both had always been so proud. In the fury of her pleading, she was no more than a mere fleshly embodiment of the desire which filled her. Like the hysterical and passion-torn woman of the afternoon, she had cast away every other consideration in life beside that which to her for the moment represented life itself.

"Give me the papers, Ellen."

"To send back to Mrs. Durham? No!"

Her fingers closed on the bulging envelope with a grip like that of the drowning. And over the whole, her husband's hand still lay in a firm restraint.

"I didn't say I was intending to send them back to Mrs. Durham, Nelly."

"Thank God!" She fell sideways against her chair, her extended arm pulling against the hand which so firmly clasped her own. Beneath the glowing immensity of her relief, she felt a faint subconscious shock of disappointment; of that thrill of contempt which the weaker must feel when it sees the stronger yield to its wiles.

Then she looked up at him with a little smile. Her cause was not yet wholly won.

"If I give you the papers, you'll promise to destroy them, yourself, darling?"

"I promise nothing. Loosen your fingers, Nelly."

She tried to laugh. "Indeed I won't, till you promise. Oh! You're pulling my hair." He desisted his efforts. She grew urgent. "Promise, Jim! They mustn't be left lying about like stray dynamite, you know! For after all we have to face the fact—forgive me if I hurt you, dearest."

She stopped short. Her thought leaped to her eyes like a cry of pain made visible. Her husband stooped to her.

"I understand you, Nelly. You mean, we have to face the fact that I am guilty."

"Jim!" she whispered painfully. "I didn't say that—I didn't even think it!"

"But it thought itself. The thought is there now. Can you deny it, Nelly?"

"Yes," she answered, but her ready tones carried no conviction with them.

"We both know better," he answered.

Then, drawing a long breath, he looked off across the room. Ellen glanced up at his tall figure. He was safe, yes; and her love was safe. No more phantoms of the police with warrants, no more clutching specters of jealousy. But the inward reality! The secret basic fact, which in this world of wiles and of weakness each human being can at need lock up even from the one beloved! She believed that circumstances wronged him, that he was innocent of the crime that every fact laid upon him. She believed, in the face of evidence. But how, after the shock which her faith had received this afternoon, could she ever *know?*

She remained looking up at him miserably. The safety for which she had so earnestly labored, so fiercely pleaded, seemed to her at the moment a thin and unsatisfactory thing indeed.

Jim turned back and leaned down toward her, still clasping her hand in his. The glow of the rising fire, leaping on his face, had given it a new look of radiance. She stared at him. Was

it only the brightness of the firelight that shone from his eyes?

"Ellen!" he said in a voice as new as the look in his face. "Ellen! I told you just now I was not intending to send these papers back to Mrs. Durham. But I did not say I had no intention of returning them to——"

He stopped, hesitated. Ellen completed his sentence.

"To whom, then?"

"To Mr. Durham, Nelly."

There was a pause. Before the immediacy of the horror thus threatened the revulsion of Ellen's mental forces was sharp and complete.

The fire, her friend and ally, burned near. With a catlike gathering of her forces, she crouched and sprang. Her hand jerked itself from her husband's clasp. The envelope flew from it, straight into the hottest part of the fire.

"What!" cried Palliser.

With a gesture as quick as her own, he stooped. From between the glowing logs his hand snatched the blackened envelope. He

straightened himself again, and Ellen stared up at him from the floor.

"It's a lucky thing for us both," he observed quietly, "that this fire was allowed to go out in the early evening. If there had been any body of hot coals beneath this new blaze it would have been all day with me, my dear!"

"I think it's all day with you now," she cried furiously. "Are you insane, Jim?"

"No," he answered quietly, as he stowed the damaged envelope in his pocket, and stood nursing his burned hand. "I think I am sane, Nelly, for the first time since this business began!"

For the first time she realized the meaning of that changed expression on his face; realized it not in rebellion but in a kind of glow that rose to meet it. "Jim! You mean——"

"Don't you know what I mean, Ellen?" he asked steadily. "Though, upon my soul, when I first took this way out of the mess I'd been forced into, it seemed natural enough. To go to an old friend who could give me the help I needed —why not? I had to ask her, to be sure, to act against her own husband; but in spite of her

crazy ways, Violet was always fair and square. It didn't seem too out-of-the-way to ask her to checkmate a game like that. Though when I began to see the need of secrecy, even from you, I'll own it went against the grain. The first time I met her, you see, was quite openly, down at the Waldorf. Then one thing and another, I found myself in up to my neck. Then at last, this letter——"

He flung out his hand in a gesture of desperation. The burned palm, striking against the desk by which he stood, caused him to wince with a sudden exclamation of pain.

"Your poor hand!" cried Ellen pitifully. "You have burned yourself!" And she remembered her own burned wrist of two nights before.

"I've burned more than myself, Nelly," he answered slowly. "What have I done to Violet? What have I done to you? When my trouble came, instead of meeting it like a man, I ran to take shelter behind women's petticoats. And what has been the result for them both? For one of them misery, scandal—who knows? Perhaps the divorce court. For the other—for you,

Nelly, who stuck by me in my troubles like the thoroughbred you are—how shall I measure the trouble and the humiliation that I have made for you? Oh, a pretty specimen I have given you for a husband," he cried, as his voice shook in a flash of his old ardent anger, "but I'll show you now, if it's not too late, that I'm a man after all! You say you believe in my innocence of this embezzling charge that hangs over me, but how can you *know?* Very well then, I'll make you know! I'll prove my innocence to you, the woman I love, even though by that very act I make myself guilty before all the world. Do you understand now, Ellen, why I am sending these papers back to Durham?"

The blood rushed to Ellen's face, the light into her eyes. She saw her husband standing before her as though glorified by his resolution; a martyr, a witness for the truth. Then came the recollection of the fate into which he was rushing, a thought horrifying like a glimpse of the stake.

"Jim, forgive me that I ever doubted you. I believed all along, in my heart, that you were innocent. I know it now—I know! Thank God,

there's no room for any doubt any more! And now, let me burn the papers!"

As she ran to him, he turned with a little smile. He had just finished addressing the long envelope which he had taken from the desk, and into which he had sealed the unharmed Achaguas receipts. His movements were slow, for his burned hand moved stiffly. As he flung down the pen he turned with a smile to the waiting, palpitating Ellen.

"My dearest, are you trying to call my bluff? Remember, if I backed out now, you could never be certain it was more than that. And besides" —his voice turned to a sudden dignified seriousness—"I am not taking this step to win your respect alone, Ellen. It is very dear to me, but there is one thing dearer yet—my own self-respect. I may be wrong, but I feel that I can never win it back till I have washed my hands clean of this intrigue by returning these papers to the man from whom they were stolen. That he is a swindler matters nothing. I decline to abase myself to his level. I throw away every advantage gained in such a way as this. I wish

I could as easily throw off my responsibility for the wreck and misery I have caused, or that I could cure what remains. But at least, I can decline to profit by it. I can try, at least, to lift myself up to the level of your devotion. If the courts choose to send me to jail on such evidence as this, then to jail I go. But I stand on my innocence. Great heavens, Ellen," he cried, turning to his wife in the sudden exaltation of his fearless impulse, "what have I got to be afraid of, whether the luck goes against me or not? I'm an innocent man, do you understand that? I am innocent!"

A moment later Palliser, turning, touched with a tender hand the streaming yellow hair that his wife lifted from his shoulder. "And now, darling," he asked gently, "before you go to bed, will you have the goodness to tell Armandine to ring for a messenger? This packet must be delivered at the Patroons the instant that the offices open in the morning."

CHAPTER XIV.

Ellen Discovers Henderson.

The situation to which Jim and Ellen Palliser woke the next morning was the unchanged and fatal difficulty of a week ago; made, however, more insoluble by the fact that the pursuer, who formerly had been driven only by fear, was now moved by resentment as well; resentment moreover for the deepest injury which a man can receive, or think he has received from another. A week ago they had been threatened by the instinct of self-preservation; now they were pursued by revenge as well. And the peril that lay before them was always and sickeningly the same.

But in the intoxication of their recovered confidence in each other, they laughed and joked over their breakfast-table like two children playing over a kindled mine. As Jim observed, crime took on a new and picturesque interest when viewed from the under side.

"Though it's too bad," he observed, "that I'm to be hauled up for such a commonplace, every-day affair. A defaulting cashier, even of the Patroons—why, it will hardly get us a front place in the front page of any self-respecting daily. Especially in times like these!" And he held up the morning paper, whose head-lines proclaimed financial calamity of many phases and sorts. "Look at that," he said with a smile, though his lips twitched and he set his coffee-cup down untasted. "If I'd been allowed my own choice of crime, like the rest of these fellows, there'd have been some dash to it, I can tell you that! Something to get me spreading head-lines in the most respectable evening papers—dynamite, or hypnotism, or blood! Well, cheer up, little girl," he interrupted himself as he jumped to his feet. "After all, it may not come to-day. And in any case, I go down to face my job."

In emulation of his gay courage, Ellen smiled at him; though her heart was the heart of a woman who sees her beloved go out to battle, with small odds of a safe return.

"You'll see—Mr. Durham?" she asked, with a slight unsteadiness in her tones.

Palliser nodded grimly. "I suppose so," he returned. "It's hardly likely he'd stay away from the office on a day like this, no matter what had happened in the way of a domestic smash." He paused, and for a moment the hard lines of his face relaxed into a real and kindly compassion. "Poor old chap," he said simply, "before he was driven to the wall he was very good to me. And Heaven knows, I never had any idea of hitting him a blow like that in return. He worshiped that girl, Ellen. Whether he manages to hold the Patroons on its feet or not, I don't see how he'll ever get over this shock."

He went, and Ellen watched him go. She knew that the next time she saw him it might be through a grating.

The morning passed with an indescribable heaviness. There were no planning and no contriving; no suspicions and no wild ferreting for the truth. All she had to do was to wait. So she sat and waited. And at every jangle of the

telephone, she winced like a wounded deserter at the ping of an approaching bullet.

Her calls were, however, harmless enough. The last one was from Charlotte Swanwick, asking her to lunch with her at the Waldorf. Anything that promised to break the grinding monotony of this suspense was welcome to Ellen. She jumped at her friend's invitation, and set out for the hotel ahead of time.

It seemed to her as she walked down the crowded Peacock Row that people were pointing at her as the wife of the celebrated Patroons defaulter. Every glance evoked by her trim beauty fell on her like a stab. The name of the trust company itself, which by an odd coincidence was borne to her ears from the conversation of two or three excited groups, seemed to her a direct challenge of her own and her husband's honor. She almost wished for the end to come, when she might proclaim her faith and fight her opponents publicly.

And beneath outward defiance, beneath her inwardly brooding horror, a silent voice ground out its unending refrain like the gramophone at

the end of a busy wire: "Where is he now? Where is he now? Where is he now?"

"Ah, Ellen! Here you are!"

Charlotte's greetings were warm, her expressions of friendship solicitous. Poor Ellen was pale, and no wonder! Well, here was their table, a nice cozy one near the corner, so they could talk. Would Ellen have a cocktail, and did she feel any draft, and would she be feeling up to the matinée, poor darling?

In the midst of the chattering, decorated throng they seated themselves and began their lunch. Charlotte, always conscientious in her efforts to entertain, was to-day almost suspiciously eager.

"What a funny old place this is! What a droll old place! What a meeting of the ends of the earth! There's Prince Z—— over there. I used to see him in Paris. And behind you, Ellen, is an English clergyman, bands and shovel-hat and all. What a lovely English voice—and how *beautifully* he drinks in his tea! What is there behind me, dear?"

"A blond lady," returned Ellen, with a faint smile, "a lovely blond lady, like——"

She paused abruptly, as she read the thought behind her friend's quick dark eyes. Then she continued firmly:

"Like the lady you took for me, last week, here with my husband. It was Mrs. Durham, wasn't it?"

The confusion below the hostess' artless assent showed what her thought had been. Ellen went on carefully:

"They're old friends, you see, Violet Durham and Jim. She used to be in the office, you know —Violet."

"H'm!" returned Charlotte, with some grimness. "I know, like everybody else in New York. Well—she's made up for it since, hasn't she?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ellen sharply.

"My dear!" Charlotte jumped in sudden confusion. "No, since I've put my foot in it, I'll admit frankly, that's not what I mean at all. You say your husband and she are old friends—well, possibly. But I've never heard his name coupled

with hers—not once, I give you my word of honor, out of the whole crowd of them."

"The whole *what?*" asked Ellen in horror.

"My dear, how can I explain, with the ecclesiastical eye full on me? I can only observe, there *are* adorers, which are the most natural appendages in the world for a beautiful lady thirty years younger than her husband. And I haven't the slightest doubt, there's not the least harm underneath. Though Mr. Belden tells me——"

"Tells you what?"

"That there are odds given in the smoking-rooms of some of the clubs how long it will be before the Durham ménage goes to smash."

Ellen lifted her goblet of water, but the ice clinked against the glass. For the moment, even the ominously ticking voice in her head was still. Her thought went back to the scene of last evening—to a great, passionate relief that her husband had rejected the aid of the woman whom Charlotte discussed. Thank God for the renunciation of last night, which gave her security for the truth of her husband's denials—for the

truth which she saw looking out at her from Charlotte's quick, understanding eyes! And thank God almost equally for the knowledge that Jim was innocent not only of broken faith, but of the broken heart which the other woman had so furiously flaunted before all concerned! A creature of overstrained and neurotic feelings, of morbid emotions; seeking ever in some fresh intrigue relief from the boring monotony of her married life—was that all she was, after all, the *grande amoureuse* who had laid at Jim Palliser's door the responsibility of her bruised existence? Poor Jim, who had so profoundly reproached himself that he was unable to cure the misery he had unwittingly caused! Well, what he could not cure, another might.

Ellen set down the glass with a little shiver. How sordid was the whole business which had nearly sucked her husband in—how vulgar! For the moment, she almost gave thanks for the certainty of ruin in which Jim by his own act now stood. From what deeper certainty of ruin had he perhaps not escaped, by flinging from him an indebtedness so unseemly? But beneath the

thought the little voice ticked on: "Where is he now? Where is he now?"

"My poor dear girl!" cried Charlotte, with concern. "You're as white as a sheet! I don't care, I *will* speak of it. I think it's so brave of you, coming out to lunch at a time like this——"

"A time like what?" asked Ellen sharply. The flowers and faces swam about her. What had Charlotte heard? Had Mr. Durham already——

She shut her eyes, then opened them again to meet her friend's compassionate gaze. "Though, I suppose, it won't really mean anything for your husband but losing his position, will it? Though Mr. Belden, when he called me up to tell me of it, told me he was sure——"

"Mr. Belden told you of it?" asked Ellen, in a low tone.

She clutched the edge of the white-damasked table for support. She had known the blow would be fearful when it fell, but she had hardly realized the picture of their friends chattering comfortably on the subject of Jim's misfortune. And Belden, the confidential friend and lawyer—

even if Mr. Durham, whipped on by the scene of yesterday, had already published his exposure of his rival, how dared Belden follow up the miserable work by prompt and eager scandalmongering? And was Jim taken now?

"How much did Mr. Belden tell you?" she asked painfully.

Charlotte sighed in a genuine concern.

"Only what everybody knows," she returned.

It seemed to Ellen that she must scream aloud. *Only what everybody knew!* Who would have thought the end could have come so quickly? And had publicity been followed by immediate legal steps? Was Jim already lodged in the Tombs?

She began rubbing on her gloves. "I must go to him," she said hurriedly. "You'll excuse me, Charlotte, won't you? I must go to him!"

"My poor dear," cried Charlotte tenderly, "now I wouldn't do that, if I were you. Of course it's all perfectly dreadful for you both. But what on earth could you do for your husband if you *did* go to him? Even supposing you could get within speaking distance of him, which I assure you is not very likely!"

These last words, with their vivid picture of a captive's limitations, fell with a horrible finality upon Ellen's imagination. Until this moment she had hardly realized the practical results of arrest on a criminal charge. But to think that, as Charlotte said, she could no longer get within speaking distance of her own husband, that now their conversations must be limited by gratings and clocks and vigilant guards.

"Not within speaking distance, even if you are his wife," repeated Charlotte wisely. "I ran down there myself, you see, just as soon as I heard the news from Mr. Belden. And I give you my word, you never in your life saw such a hubbub and such a crowd! The place inside all jammed to the swing-doors, and the queue winding up and down the steps and down the Avenue. And all the motors, and hansoms, and taxicabs arriving every minute—my dear girl, you *are* ill! Here, don't faint! Now, you mustn't faint!"

"Charlotte!" gasped Ellen, pushing away the offered vinaigrette. What gruesome spectacle was this that was being made of her husband's ruin? Jim Palliser, so proud and dignified—Jim

Palliser, an innocent man! She was cold all over, then hot for shame. "Charlotte! Are people brutes, or are they simply mad? Do you mean to say, they've come to *look on* at such a sight as that?"

"Look on?" returned Charlotte, with a stare. "No, you dear little goose! They've just come to draw out their money—if they can!"

"What?" gasped Ellen, panting. "I don't understand you, Charlotte! Surely, there's no reason that people should be rushing this way for their money, even if——"

"Even if the rumor *is* flying about town that the Patroons had a couple of millions of the paper of that copper firm that went smash last week, and even if—— Look here, darling, I beg your pardon, I ought to have realized that for you the Patroons is more or less of a family affair. But you mean to say you weren't prepared —do you mean to say your husband hadn't told you, the poor old trust company was likely to come a cropper any day?"

"A cropper?" gasped the bewildered Ellen. "Then it's only the trust company——"

"Only a raid of depositors on the trust company—just a plain, ordinary run on the bank, my dear. Though people were saying, it's the first really *smart* bank-run that ever was seen!"

"But Charlotte—then you didn't see Jim?"

"I caught a glimpse of him in the background. my dear, giving orders to about twenty porters who were staggering in with cartons of gold. Poor man, it's hard on him, as they say there's no chance of all the depositors being paid, not the ghost of a chance. However, I was one of the lucky ones—fifteen hundred dollars in yellow-backs, right here in my stocking, my dear! Well, well, but I can't get over the idea that you didn't hear the news. Where have you kept yourself all day? This town is simply buzzing with it, and as for this hotel—why, didn't you hear the name to the right and left everywhere, as you came in?"

"I did hear the word Patroons once or twice as I came in," returned Ellen mechanically. Her brain, cleared of the horror raised by her blunder, braced itself to meet the situation thus unfolded to her.

For her and for her husband, this sudden crash of the Patroons Trust Company could mean only one thing: the immediate bursting of the calamity that hung over them. The impending inquiry into the bank's affairs, the discovery of the worthless collateral and yet more worthless notes, initialed by the man who was already deep in the stock represented by the collateral—could any incompleted syllogism point more logically to its own conclusion?

For one moment, as she realized the bitterness of the cup thus presented, not dimly in the future but concrete and close at hand, Ellen almost found it in her heart to regret her husband's rash chivalry of last night. Honor was all very well. But the Tombs!

And there was nothing to be done. Nothing that she could do, any more.

She turned to put on her jacket. "If you'll excuse me, Charlotte, I really think I'll try to get Jim on the telephone."

"Take care!" cried Charlotte warningly, but too late. Ellen, rising blindly from her chair, had collided with the tray of a waiter. The man

stumbled forward in a vain effort to save his burden, but too late. Sugar-bowl, hot-water jug, and silver teapot went shooting through the air. There was a crash, a muttered explosion of "Gaul durn it!" a whirl of confusion in which the waiter besought for pardon.

"No harm done, my man, none at all," was the answer, in rich English tones, from the injured gentleman.

"How funny!" whispered Charlotte to her guest, who stood with arrested purpose, hesitating, amazed. "How funny! Did you hear the way that clergyman swore? Just like a real American!"

As though screwing her courage to put to the test some new idea newly born, Ellen turned slowly. The clergyman, a portly and sunburned individual, was busily scrubbing his coat-sleeve with a napkin supplied by the waiter. As though feeling the intensity of Ellen's gaze, he glanced upward with alert, cautious eyes.

They remained staring at each other for a half moment, while the healthy dark tint of the stranger's clean-shaven face faded slowly to a

faint pearl-gray. Then with an effort of self-control which caused the veins to stand out like knotted cords on his bald forehead, the reverend gentleman picked up his cup and began to sip his tea.

With a long breath, Ellen turned back to her friend. There was a pink flush in her cheeks and her eyes glowed with a strange excitement.

"My dear Charlotte, you'll excuse me if I seem to give you the slip, won't you? It's been a lovely party, but I must—I must see Jim. You can find something to do with yourself, can't you?"

Mrs. Swanwick laughed with a sly demureness. "Oh," she said, "I can jump in a tax and go and eat lunch all over again with Mr. Belden, the poor dear. I've a notion he's waiting for me, somewhere at the down-town Martin's, this minute. So if you *really* don't mind——" She buttoned her gloves, with a longing glance toward the door which showed where her desire led her. "It's a ridiculous way for a party to break up, but if you're sure you don't mind—— Why do you look so strangely, Ellen? Why do you glance sideways, like that?"

"I don't," returned Ellen, adjusting her veil with a fiercely impatient hand.

"It's all right, dear! But do you know, I thought for an instant you had discovered a long-lost uncle, or something"—she lowered her voice to a whisper—"in our friend the lordly rector here! Isn't he lovely! One can just hear the prayers for his majesty, and smell the primroses, when one looks at him; though he *did* look rather green, after that shower of tea. Well, ta-ta, old girl. You're sure I can't give you a lift to the Patroons?"

"I must telephone first," responded Ellen. Her patience was nearly at an end.

The Englishman, having signed his check, rose to his feet.

"Ta-ta!" cried the dawdling Charlotte.

At last, she was gone. Ellen, with a smile and with outstretched hand, walked deliberately after the retreating clergyman.

"What a pleasure!" she said in her brightest tones. "Who would have thought of seeing you here, doctor?"

Then as he started, fumbled, and controlled himself to accept her hand and her greeting, she added below her breath:

"You see, I have good eyes, and a good memory, Mr. Henderson!"

CHAPTER XV.

Driven to the Wall.

They sat together in the Turkish Room, a group more eminently discreet than is invariably seen in that famous apartment; the tall, pretty young woman who spoke so low and with such bitter energy, and the gentleman whose grave air and clerical vestments proclaimed his Anglican respectability. Considering his appearance, his words were of a rather startling nature.

"Very well, then. If I admit frankly that you are right, Mrs. Palliser, will you give me your word not to hand me over to the police?"

Ellen surveyed the speaker thoughtfully. "That's what I ought to do, of course. It's my duty as a citizen to see you punished—to see that you hand back what's left of the money you carried off with you."

He made a mild gesture of deprecation in the perfect pulpit style. "But there's so little left, dear lady—so little left!"

"I have no doubt of that," returned Ellen grimly, "but what I can't make out, Mr.—ah—what I don't understand is why you came back."

"Business, business! Affairs left at loose ends with one or two of our leading capitalists—little matters that I had managed to serve them in, and could again. Then, to tell you the truth—er!—a certain lady from whom I had no news since the unfortunate matter of my drowning. That was not badly managed, was it?" He spoke with a certain pride. Then, in a sudden outburst of confidence: "But above all, dear lady, the lure! Have you ever imagined it or felt it, the lure of all this?" He spread his sleek hands wide. "I'm a New Yorker born and bred. I'd stewed in their swamps down there, and jabbered their lingo, and watched their Cheap-Jack imitation of life, till I *had* to get back to the real thing, if only for a fortnight. And my, isn't it good!" The eyes behind his gold-bowed spectacles roamed lovingly about the room. "Little old New York! Just to see it, and listen to it, and smell it once more—I *had* to! I'm damned if I ever——"

He drew a long breath, and for a moment his face showed the fear and bitterness which lurked within. "There I go again!" he said, with fierce disgust. "After all, it's all in the way a man's brought up, isn't it, Mrs. Palliser? The night I dined with you and your husband, I gave myself away. To-day again, after holding in for two weeks, gave myself away again. You've sharper eyes than the detectives, I don't deny that. But just the same, you wouldn't ever have recognized me, if that durned little word—I beg your pardon—hadn't come slipping out, would you?"

"I certainly would not," returned Ellen truthfully, with her eyes on the bland, priestly visage which confronted her.

"Good get-up, isn't it?" he remarked, with pride. "Got the idea from an old chap on the Barcelona boat, coming back from Rio. So when I got up to London I just loaded up on these clerical togs, and got a shave, and a pair of window-glass spectacles—and I've walked in and out of this place for two weeks, in the face of all the Pinkertons in town. Then just for one con-

founded cup of tea, that I only drank for the sake of the stage effect, just for one damned little word, that slipped out before I knew it, I gave myself away and here I am. Confound it, it's miserable luck, that's what it is, Mrs. Palliser. I was sailing this very afternoon, on the *Lusitania.*"

"Mr.—ah! I beg your pardon." Ellen leaned forward with glittering eyes. "Perhaps you can sail on her after all."

"Ah—what?" The man carried his plump hand to the clean-shaven lips which, in spite of his enforced calm, trembled with the intensity of his emotion. "Now let us talk frankly, Mrs. Palliser. I'm an old friend of your husband's. Can we arrange a friendly deal?"

Ellen's head swam. She saw light ahead. If any blame or any shame attached itself to this compounding of a felony, then she would take it all upon herself. Jim should be kept out of the affair—Jim, from whom she had snatched his own defense, should now be saved at her responsibility, and by her hand. Whether or not it was right to let the criminal go free, it seemed to

her better than to see the innocent suffer. Henderson, and Henderson alone, could save Jim. But he could hardly be expected to do so at a less price than his own freedom.

Her decision was taken. In a few words she related to her stately, twitching listener the story of the Achaguas deal as she had heard it from Jim. In spite of the agony of suspense in which Henderson sat, his interest and amazement were evident.

"So it was with the bank's money the old rascal bought my stock! If I had known *that!*" he exclaimed in virtuous indignation. "So you mean to tell me that now the funds are—ahem—lost, he is intending to maintain that the deal was not his own, but Mr. Palliser's?"

Ellen trembled with delight. "So you understood clearly that Mr. Durham was the purchaser of your stock, and not my husband?"

He stared. "Mr. Palliser acted as Mr. Durham's agent in making the payments for the first purchase. He told me Mr. Palliser was accustomed to transacting his business for him. *I* never thought anything of it!"

"But the notes?" cried Ellen. "The notes, secured by Achaguas stock—it was Mr. Durham who made you those loans, or my husband?"

"Mr. Durham, of course," returned Henderson, with a look of surprise.

"Ah!" Ellen wet her lips. Her next question was so immense, so momentous that she could hardly bear to ask it.

"But—but," she said, "you have papers of Mr. Durham's—letters, orders, signed slips, and so forth, which show he was a stockholder in the Achaguas Rubber—which prove it was he, and not my husband, who lent you the half-million out of the bank's funds?"

For one moment, across the benignant face which she so feverishly scanned, flitted an expression of cunning which showed the sharper's soul beneath. *"Have I?"* he said. "You don't suppose a man in my position is going to destroy any papers with a responsible man's signature on the tail of them, do you?"

Ellen's relief was so great as to break out in open laughter. At that clear, trembling peal, one or two persons near turned in admiring sym-

pathy. Then she spoke again in a tone low but urgent:

"You have them here with you? Here in New York?" He nodded. "Here at the hotel?"

"No—down at my old partner's office, in Wall Street."

"You can get them at once?"

His eyes beamed mild reproach and amazement. "Mrs. Palliser! For me to go there would be suicide."

"Then telephone. Tell him to send them at once, by messenger."

He shook his head. "There are difficulties. We have fears that he is shadowed. In that case, the mail would be the only safe means of communication."

"Which means," cried Ellen sharply, "we must wait till five o'clock!"

"Quiet, quiet, dear lady! Yes—five o'clock."

Ellen thought swiftly. The calamity which even at this moment was pouring thick and fast upon the unfortunate Patroons Trust; which even as she sat here was battering down its credit and its doors together, ripping open its secrets, call-

ing its officials to account—all this afforded enough, in the way of mere outside pressure, to call down the dreaded disaster on her husband's head. But added to that were the dreadful forces working from within—the hatred of a jealous husband, the vengeful desires of a man who believed himself wounded in the dearest point of honor. And again in Ellen's brain, loud and imperative, rose up that awful insistent inner voice, not as a question but as a summons: "Where is he now? Where is he now?"

Where was Jim Palliser now, indeed? Even now as she sat here talking, who knew but——

She jumped to her feet. "Will you please come with me now—at once?"

"I am honored, Mrs. Palliser. Where?"

"To the Patroons Trust."

He shrank away. His ruddy face grew mottled. She laid her hand gently on his arm. "Pull yourself together, you will attract attention. And don't attempt to argue the point here. Wait till we are in the cab."

A few moments later, as the disguised defaulter seated himself beside her in the taximeter,

he turned toward her for the first time with the open terror that he felt.

"You told the man, the Patroons Trust, Mrs. Palliser! I can't go there, don't you understand? If, as you say, Durham is on his last legs, and has to find some one to lay the responsibility on, then don't you see that he'd take me? What's the use of keeping up the bluff, at this stage? Achaguas Rubber was just that, from the beginning—just *rubber!* I got rubbered myself. even —where the money's gone to I hardly know, but it's gone—all but a few thousands. Durham holds my notes—I have no funds to redeem them. At a time like this, when he himself is going to the wall, do you think he'll spare me? Here's the plain truth, Mrs. Palliser—I'm criminally liable for the loss of Durham's money."

"You forget one thing," returned Ellen steadily. "It was *not* Mr. Durham's money."

He glanced at her in sudden comprehension. Then, taking off his shovel-hat, he mopped his glistening forehead. "You've a head, Mrs. Palliser! What with my nervousness and trying situation, and all that, I confess the point quite

escaped me. You mean, Durham himself is criminally liable, no less than me."

She nodded. "Precisely. And you are the only person in America who can prove it. Do you understand?"

He became almost blithe. "I see your point, Mrs. Palliser. You mean—Durham can't round on me, because I can round on him, the worst way. But—your husband, Mrs. Palliser? Do you think he'll be as willing as you to—er—compound the felony?"

"Do you think he'd betray the man who saved him, Mr. Henderson?" returned Ellen.

He started and glanced around. "Be careful about that name, Mrs. Palliser! And say! Look at that blockade ahead there on the Avenue! Is there a fire?"

A recollection of Charlotte's words came back to Ellen. It seemed indeed that every hansom, and taximeter, and private motor in town were packed and swaying in the portion of the Avenue which they approached. Over the tightly wedged jam rose the familiar granite arches of the trust company.

Ellen rapped on the glass to attract the notice of the chauffeur. "To the side door, on —th Street," she commanded.

Henderson caught her by the arm. For the first time, as he realized her intention, the terror of the hunted creature leaped into his face.

"Mrs. Palliser, for God's sake! Why do you drag me in there? Wait till this evening! I'll get you the papers this evening, I give you my oath!"

"This evening may be too late," she answered, "and if so, what could your papers do then but give a proof of Jim's innocence, *after* his arrest? *After* his indictment? The guilt might be disproved, but the taint would stay. No, we must save him this moment, if we are not already too late!"

"But what can I do, Mrs. Palliser? Without those letters and signed slips, what can I do to influence Durham?"

"He knows that you have them, Mr. Henderson. He thinks you are five thousand miles away, where you cannot possibly use them against him—where Jim can never lay hands on

them for his defense. But when he sees you here, with me, do you suppose he will not understand?"

Ellen spoke rapidly, excitedly. The weapon which chance had slipped into her hand was one for which she had not even dared to hope. Pray Heaven, she was not too late to use it in Jim's defense!

The taximeter, halting before the side door of the Patroons, had to wait a moment for an express-cart backed up to the curb. From the curb to the door stretched a double line of policemen, and between the line hurried men in the dark-green livery of the trust company, bending under heavy cartons which they carried with anxious care.

"They're getting in gold from outside," observed Henderson. "By Jove, it *is* a run and no mistake! Is there the ghost of a chance we can see Durham?"

"Don't deceive yourself with vain hopes, Mr. Henderson," returned Ellen, with a resolution that tightened her jaws. "We are *going* to see him!"

"And if the business slips a cog somewhere?" cried the fugitive defrauder. "If I get recognized and caught, Mrs. Palliser?"

She regarded him with a stern scorn. "Then, Mr. Henderson—excuse me!—but you will be getting only what you deserve. In order to save an innocent man from bearing the burden of your crime, I am giving you this chance to buy your own freedom by securing his. For my husband's sake, I can't afford to give you away. For his own sake, Mr. Durham can even less afford to turn against you. Play your game with spirit, promise him his own letters and order-slips in return for the Achaguas receipts which bear Mr. Palliser's name, and you save not only yourself but two other people—*three* other people. Do you understand?"

"I understand," her companion admitted, swallowing hard and fingering his spotless clerical collar, "but it is a risk."

"A risk!" cried Ellen indignantly. "And you ought to be on your knees, giving me thanks that it's not a certainty!"

A few moments later, they stood together in the inner corridor of the trust company. The defaulter had pulled himself together, and stood a dignified figure, gazing on the confusion around him. Messenger-boys were ceaselessly departing and arriving. At a table near them, two bank officials were receiving and verifying the boxes of gold which the uniformed porters piled beside them. A half-dozen clerks rushed by with huge piles of ledgers. A puffing individual, whom Ellen recognized as one of the directors, strode frowning down the corridor.

Through the open doorway which led to the public offices without came the murmuring hum of the thronging depositors. It was a sound indescribably menacing and insistent. It seemed to Ellen that she was on the stage, listening to the greedy roar of an enraged mob in the auditorium. She shivered to think that Jim, in spite of the relief she was bringing to him personally, must share the anxiety and the fate of those from whom this swarming crowd sought its rights.

She felt a touch on her elbow. She turned to

look into the pink face of her young acquaintance of two days ago.

"Mrs. Palliser! I tell you straight, it ain't no use," he said hurriedly. "Mr. Palliser couldn't see the Angel Gabriel if he called—I wouldn't dare interrupt him even with your name, see? Why, *look!* Ain't it awful? The old Patroons! Them cowards out there, I despise 'em!" And he shook his fist in the direction of the depositors, while the captive Henderson brightened visibly.

"The boy is right, Mrs. Palliser," he observed demurely, as he edged toward the door. "It seems a most unreasonable time to insist, and if——"

Ellen detained him with her hand. "Wait, my dear doctor!" She turned back to the boy. "It's not my husband I must speak with. It's Mr. Durham."

"Mr. Doy'm!" cried the boy in an awed whisper, as he stood aside to admit the passing of two sleek, black-haired gentlemen with little notebooks and vulturelike noses. "Mr. Doy'm! Honest, are you crazy? He's been shut up with the directors, this past hour. All the big bugs in

town are here to-day, a-jawin' wit' him, see? He's expecting —— now!" And he named a name august like that of royalty in New York finance.

For answer Ellen took her card and wrote a few words upon it.

"Will you give that to Mr. Durham, at once? He will understand it, I think. And I think he will see us."

The boy hesitated. "I hardly know as I das. He come down to the office lookin' like death this mornin', even before them fools out there begun. Well, he swore at me this morning—he can't do woyse than eat me, now!" And doubtfully, he departed.

Ellen, with the reluctant Henderson beside her, pushed up through the thronging corridor until they stood beside the closed door of the president's room.

Here they stopped. The strained, preoccupied faces that hurried past them took no notice of their presence. Ellen's eyes, fiercely compelling, were on the man whom she held beside her by the mere force of her will. As for Henderson,

he stood with his face close-pressed to a framed engraving which he examined with a great air of near-sighted interest. But beneath his tanned and shaven cheek the pulse beat like a hammer. From the outer offices, the voice of the crowd beat back with an inarticulate roar like that of a sea-beach. From the occasional glimpse that Ellen caught it was plain that the depositors were still being paid off.

She caught a word tossed from one tense-faced man to another, as a pair of clerks hurried past her. "*Something's* got to break!" said the one, and the other nodded. "Thank God, it's ten minutes of closing-time!" he said.

Ellen shivered. The old Patroons Trust, whose granite arches had been for New York the very symbol of the city's financial stability—was it possible that company was going to break? In the voices, the footsteps, the hard-set faces that stirred and flashed about her, she beheld the outward symbol of a destruction impalpable yet vital. All about her was quivering and shattering the airy fabric which forms the foundation of the solid business world—the confidence of

each man in the other's ability to pay. In the faces about her, confidence had changed to fear —a fear which before to-morrow must have infected the whole country with panic. In witnessing this attack upon the most famous trust company in America, it seemed to her that she stood in the very heart of the whirlwind, in the very center of the financial storm which must bring disaster, or reflected disaster, to the whole world.

The door beside her opened. Two gentlemen emerged, one stately, the other sharp-set, but both marked with the same look of grave anxiety.

"I'll telephone you before five o'clock, Durham," said the first.

Mr. Durham, leaning heavily on the bronze door-knob, made an inaudible reply. Even before he beheld her and her companion, Ellen was shocked by the aspect of his face. His lips and hollow eyes wore the same look as that which, for one dreadful moment yesterday, she had seen darkening them; but now more painful because,

though less keenly edged, that look of pain had now been printed there by pitiless conviction and by a sleepless night. Should she put out her hand to add to so plain a suffering?

For one moment she hesitated, then she gripped her resolution. It was to save Jim. And the man before her, however great his private misfortunes, had nothing to fear from her as an honest man, but as the thief of trust-money and of friendly faith.

Her young friend darted forward, but she forestalled him. As the two directors, with a hasty nod, hurried away, she stepped forward.

"Mr. Durham, can you spare me a moment?" she said boldly.

He turned his weary eyes upon her as though hardly conscious of her presence. "No time now, no time now," he said testily. Then, raising his glance over her shoulder: "Come in, Lewisohn, come right in."

"I think you had better see me," said Ellen determinedly. Then, stepping forward, she spoke into his ear.

"Mr. Henderson is here," she said.

The financier flashed upon her a look which, even in his present battered and desperate condition, held something of the majesty of one accustomed to rule. "Nonsense!" he said. "This is no time, Mrs. Palliser, for worrying me about your little affair."

The waiting clerks and officials crowded up from behind Ellen. Her moment was slipping by. Raising her voice, she spoke smilingly across the corridor.

"Will you come here, doctor, if you please?" she said.

With slow steps, hesitating yet dignified with the stateliness of mortal necessity, the august figure of the defaulter pushed through the throng. In the faces of those about was plainly shown their disgust at this intrusion of woman and of priest, at this time of keen-drawn crisis in the affairs of men.

"Here, Mr. Durham, is the gentleman you wanted to see," she said smoothly.

Mr. Durham retreated into his room. His

eyes were fixed on those of the nervously smiling Henderson. The change that came over the banker's face was like that which occurs at the moment of death; from the mobility of suffering into a final fixity. That he recognized the man before him, and realized the significance of his return, there could be no doubt.

The subordinates, seeing only that the intruders were to take place of them, had hurried away. The two men, whose association had begun in such bright if unlawful hopes, stood staring at each other over the ruin which now confronted each in the person of the other. Mr. Durham spoke first.

"Glad to see you," he said thickly. "No notion you were in town. Just a moment. I'm very tired. Just wait a moment."

He swung the heavy door to with a crash.

"What's he going to do now?" asked Henderson, with white lips. "Telephone for the police?"

"He won't dare," replied Ellen, with outward confidence, though vague doubts smote her heart. "As he says, he is very tired. No wonder he

wants a moment to pull himself together, for an interview like——"

She stopped short. From behind the door of the president's room, right at her elbow as it seemed, came suddenly a sharp and unreverberating report.

The sound, so unexpected, so full of a deadly significance, arrested the tide of life in the corridor like a drop-curtain suddenly let down over the stage. For one moment voices and steps were suspended together. The whole busy crowd forgot their surging anxieties of life, before this sound that spoke of death. From the outer offices, the hum of the swarming visitors swelled up as the roar of a passing mob swells through the open door of a church.

Mr. Miller, the chief accountant, an acquaintance of Ellen's, jumped forward and seized her arm as she stood by the door.

"It came from in there!" he whispered. She nodded, and he tried the door.

It yielded immediately, and the man entered. Pushed by the curious and horror-smitten crowd behind her, Ellen was forced into the room. Al-

most against her will, she was borne up past the mahogany roll-top desk; where, among a great litter of papers and of bronze desk-fittings, William Durham's gray head had fallen forward. It lay motionless upon the red-stained blotter, and beside it lay his hand still clasping the revolver.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Thoroughbred to the End.

In the little private room which bore on its door the legend "Mr. Palliser," Ellen lay weakly back in a large leather-covered chair. Beside her on the table sat a small glass of brandy which the office-boy, eager to requite past kindness, had run to fetch her from a neighboring hotel. For even her nerves which she strove to make so steady had come near to collapsing at the horror of the recent sight.

The door was partly open, but from behind it came no sound. The roar of thronging voices and of scurrying footsteps had ceased with a sudden silence, as when the wind falls upon the sea. The bank was closed, but the stillness was more than that. She shivered, for she knew it to be the silence of death.

What that death meant, for her and for one she loved better than herself, she had as yet hardly realized. She lifted her hand to her

breast, then dropped it again. Poor old Mr. Durham! Not only to himself, but to all that his life had touched, its sudden taking-off must come only as a relief—to the wife whom he adored, and who now would see herself free from a bond she had loathed to the point of open rebellion; to the friend on whom he had placed the burden of his own peculations; to the friend's wife who had doubted her own power, even with the reenforcements which chance had bestowed upon her, to force from him the admission of his fraud. And to the person who represented these reenforcements!

In spite of herself, Ellen's pale lips contracted in a twitching smile. She did not need to be told —she could guess the relief with which Henderson, taking advantage of the horror-smitten confusion, had melted into the crowd and disappeared.

Was it her duty to see to it that he was pursued and brought back—he who had defrauded not only the bank and its depositors, but a thousand hard-working investors unknown to her?

She had not claimed his fulfilment of his part

of their agreement because she had not needed to claim it. Yet she felt that her own word bound her. After all, where was the practical use of giving up a man who claimed, with every probability of truth, to have lost practically all of his own nefarious gains? He could never restore the lost funds to the company. There could be small good, as a result of a step doubtfully right. For, after all, the defaulter, though he had not fulfilled the letter of his bond, had fulfilled it in spirit by securing beyond question the safety of the man she loved.

By rising like a phantom of retribution before the guilty Durham, Henderson had wrought out the just apportionment of good and evil in a way more wonderful than she could have foreseen, more conclusive than she could have dared to hope. If not by his hand at least by his agency, Jim Palliser was free forever from the foul and baseless charge which for this past week had hung over him. Again she raised her hand to her bosom, with a little quivering smile. Then she started. The door swung softly open, and her husband entered the room.

His face was changed since the morning. The recent shock, as well as the grinding anxieties of the morning, had left its mark upon it. He came in wearily, and bent over his wife.

Neither of them spoke. He laid his hand gently upon her shoulder; and with a little caressing gesture she rested her cheek upon it.

"Poor old Durham!" said Palliser at last. "Poor old Durham."

"Yes," she said, with a faint shudder of recollection, and again there was silence.

Palliser flung himself into a chair.

"I'm about dead beat," he said heavily. "There are a thousand things waiting out there for me, but I'll sit down just a moment. It's been a hard day, Nelly. A hard day for us all."

He sighed. For the credit of the institution he served was dear to him like his own; and the scenes of the day had been for him a strain less severe only than his own personal danger. Though for the trust company he could see hope ahead, while for himself——

With scorn of his own egotism at such a mo-

ment, he pushed the thought of self from his mind.

"A hard day," he repeated again, with a droop in his strong voice, "for us all. But for Durham, it came on top of a day that was harder yet. You see, his life was made up of two fixed ideas: his wife, and this trust company. When he thought he had lost them both, and then came all of a sudden on that revolver—my revolver that I had left in the table-drawer——" He drew his muscles together in a visible clutch at his self-control. "You see, I've been there myself, Nelly," he said in his deepest voice. "I know the look that that little instrument takes on for a man, when he has made up his mind that life is not worth living any more. And for poor old Durham, you see, it was just twice as bad as it was for me."

Ellen nodded. Then she took in her breath to tell him of Durham's encounter with the strangely resurrected defaulter—but, after all, why waste time or strength on the story at such a moment? Barring its natural interest, the revelation could matter little now; and there were other matters more pressing.

"So he just decided it wasn't worth while to go on living," went on Palliser, in a voice still touched with the awe of the death-presence, "and the tragedy of it is, he was quite right. For the fact remains, the best service he could do the two idols to which his life was devoted was to rid them of it. Violet was ready to leave him, any day. It wasn't a question of me, as she said—it was pure boredom, an insanity of boredom. And as for the Patroons—well, Nelly, by this act he has given the directors the scapegoat that he had thought to make of me. He has given the directors the scapegoat that they must have, to save the institution. For the Achaguas losses, as well as the mismanagement that has led to this crash of to-day—the blame for all this must rest on the late president.

"The bulk of the capital remains unimpaired. So by subscribing new loans, and reorganizing the company from top to bottom, there can be little doubt that the directors can put the Patroons Trust on its feet again. I don't mind owning, from something the chairman said to me just now, I'd have a good chance at the presi-

dency myself—if I didn't have a better chance of something very different."

He flung himself heavily into a chair.

Ellen glanced up, suddenly bright-eyed. "If what?" she asked.

"I'm an egoist, Nelly, I know, to think of myself at a time like this, with death and destruction crashing all about me. It's not that I regret having sent back these papers—under the same circumstances, I'd do the same thing again. But the uncertainty, Nelly! His lawyers are in there with his papers now. The notes and vouchers, signed with my name, will be opened and placed on file. And to-morrow——"

He paused, drew a deep breath, and went on:

"To-morrow, Nelly, we have decided to keep our doors closed for the day. The directors will hold a special meeting, and it is likely that the examiners will be here. The accounts will be inspected figure by figure, the balance verified. The half-million shortage will be found. In the absence of evidence against any one else, the president would be held responsible; his suicide at such a time would be accepted for what it is,

an open confession of guilt. 'Patroons' President Kills Himself. Shortage in Funds Discovered. Loans of Half-million of Bank's Money to Wildcat Company he Held Stock in.' Can't you see the head-lines, to-morrow?

"But before to-morrow, Nelly, they'll find those papers that put the whole burden of the transaction on me. The only question is, *when?*" He looked at his wife and tried to smile. "The old Patroons is going to weather this gale, Nelly," he said. "It's a bad blow, but by taking in sail and going it slow she can weather it. Yes, the ship will sail on, all right—but Palliser will be dropped overboard. The only question, as I say, is *when?*" And with hands that shook slightly he lit a cigarette.

"Give me one, Jim!" said Ellen suddenly. With a look of some surprise, he handed her his case. "No, not a cigarette, Jim—a match!"

With the gesture that formerly had ended ineffectually, Ellen's hand flew to her blouse. From the folds beneath the pleated lace ruffles she slowly drew an envelope—a long white en-

velope, addressed in Jim's handwriting, and flecked in one corner with a tiny spot of red.

"What?" cried her husband, hardly daring to believe his eyes. *"What?"*

She nodded. "I was pushed into Mr. Durham's room," she said. "I saw this lying on the table, beside—— At any rate, no one was looking at me. I took my chance. I thought I had the right. For they belong to *you,* Jim! Have I your permission to open this envelope?"

He did not answer, but continued to stare like a man dazed. She took his silence for assent. Carefully avoiding the touch of the tiny scarlet stain on the outer corner, Ellen tore open the envelope and drew out the familiar papers.

"They are all here," she said, counting them. "And now, Jim——"

Their eyes met. "Ellen," said her husband hoarsely. "Ellen——"

"Time enough for all that, Jim!" she said in fierce impatience. "But now, now——"

With a long rending scratch she lit her match. The tiny yellow flame flared up pallidly in the afternoon sun.

"Last night, Jim, you refused me your permission to do this. I honored you for your refusal. But to-day I have earned the right. Jim, if you still object, stop me!" She touched her match to the stained corner of the envelope. "One—two—three!"

Still Palliser sat motionless. Ellen jumped to her feet. The crawling flame licked the white paper and blue together. She stood like a priestess, holding out her blazing torch. The filmy black fragments fluttered slowly to the carpet.

"Take care!" cried Palliser sharply. "You'll burn your hand!"

She smiled at him as with an adroit movement she flung the remaining corner upon the ash-tray beside her. The paper continued slowly to burn, till the last flame died in a flickering spark. The wind, drawing lightly through the window, blew the charred fragments off into impalpable ash.

Palliser surveyed her in a heat of admiration. "You thoroughbred!" he said. "Even there in the presence of death, you could remember me and my necessity?"

She went to him. "Don't you know, Jim," she said, with passion, "what it is that is said to be stronger than death?"

He took her hands. "I know now, dearest," he said. "I think I know now, myself!"

THE END.